



Northern Ireland
Assembly

OFFICIAL REPORT

(Hansard)

Volume 50

(22 March 2010 to 25 April 2010)

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	Mr Robin Newton

*** The position of Minister of Justice came into being on 12 April 2010.**

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 22 March 2010

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Assembly Business

Speaker's Ruling

Mr Speaker: Before we begin this afternoon's proceedings, I wish to make some comments on recent debates in the Chamber, especially those of last week. I am concerned by the comments that were made. Some Members have either caused considerable offence to others or fallen short of the standards of debate in this House or displayed a lack of respect, especially to the Chair.

Certainly, in relation to the lack of respect for the authority of the Chair, I was disappointed to note the challenges made by Mr Storey and Mr McNarry during last Monday's sitting. In case there is any doubt, let me make it absolutely clear once more that it is not in order to challenge the Chair in any way, especially in the way that Members did on those two particular occasions. I warn Members: I have raised the issue in this Chamber for some time, yet we still have Members who feel that they can get up in this Chamber and challenge the authority of the Chair. I can assure Members on all sides of the House that that will not happen — that will not happen. I certainly ask Members to reflect on the difficulties that would arise if Members were repeatedly to challenge the authority of the Chair. Members who make such challenges in future may not be called to speak in debates in the Chamber for some time.

In relation to the standards for debate, Members should, by now, be fully aware of my ruling of 24 November 2009, when I introduced a different approach to moderating the use of language in the Chamber. Rather than focus on particular words or phrases that might previously have been described as unparliamentary language, I now judge Members' remarks against the standards of courtesy, good temper and moderation.

Importantly, in making my judgements, I take into account the context in which Members make their remarks.

Let me say to Members on all sides that I understand that on occasions, especially during some of the debates in the Chamber, emotions may rise. I can understand that. However, when Members are warned to temper their language they should do so, rather than trying to repeat it. Once again I say to all sides, when the Chair indicates clearly that Members are about to cross the line, or have crossed the line, it is vitally important that Members reflect on what has been said and try to use different language. Certainly, when I adjudge remarks to have fallen short of those standards, I may ask Members to moderate their remarks, withdraw them, or move on. In future, if a Member feels that they can challenge the authority of the Chair, I intend to ask that Member to take his place, and I will move on to the next Member. It will be as simple as that.

With that in mind, I was very disappointed that, during last Monday's sitting, Mr Bell refused to accept the authority of the Chair. Therefore, I caution Mr Bell that a further challenge of that nature will result in him not being called to speak in the Chamber for some time. When a Member knows that he has crossed the line with unparliamentary language and is asked to withdraw the comment, but further repeats the comment and challenges the Chair, I assure Members that, from here on in, that Member will not only be removed from the House but will not take part in debates in the Chamber for some time.

When the Chair indicates very clearly to a Member that he is using unparliamentary language, I would have thought that that Member would, at least, have respect for the Chair, and would, as far as possible, withdraw the remarks; but to further challenge and repeat the remarks is

something that I, as Speaker of the Assembly, will not have. I will not have it from any Member, whether it is Mr Bell or anybody else. I have made that clear a number of times. However, it is quite obvious that there are Members who are continually rising in their places and are prepared to challenge the authority of the Chair. I can assure Members that that will not happen and will not continue.

Remarks made by other Members during recent sittings have also caused offence, including comments such as those made by Mr Kinahan last Monday. I have read Hansard, and I can understand that, during the cut and thrust of debate, Members may say things and on reflection may think differently about how they express themselves.

Remarks made by Mr Poots on 1 March about Mr Dallat caused particular offence, and certainly the Member has spoken to me about it. At the time the remarks were made, I judged them against the context of a very heated debate, when strong remarks were made by a number of Members from a seated position. At that time, I responded by calling on all Members to temper their remarks. I have since discussed the matter with Mr Poots and have asked him to consider how he might best address the offence taken at those remarks. I understand that Mr Poots will meet with Mr Dallat to try to see if they can reach an understanding on the issue.

Mr Kennedy: *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. I now consider the matter closed, and will not allow it to be reopened by any points of order. Once again, I caution all Members — all Members — on the language that they may use in the House, and especially about making a challenge to the Chair.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr S Wilson): On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: If it is a point of order on the issues that I have raised —

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: It is not a point of order on the issues that you have raised, but it arises from the points that you have raised. On the issue involving one of the Members whom you named, the occasion arose because he was seeking a retraction from the Education Minister in respect of an allegation that she made about my Department and me. Will you give some guidance on how

the incorrect information that was given can be remedied on the Floor of the House, since it was given on the Floor of the House?

Mr Speaker: I am not prepared to open this up to points of order, but let me answer the Minister. If any Member of this House feels that a Minister has not given correct information in the Chamber, there are clear guidelines on how that can be corrected. It is really up to Ministers to decide how they will correct information. In the past, Ministers have written to me with such information. None of us is perfect; we all make mistakes. Ministers have addressed those mistakes through a letter from their Department. There are different ways of addressing incorrect information that Ministers have given, sometimes through no fault of their own, to the House.

I am not prepared to take any further points of order on the issue, because I would feel that Members were trying to challenge the authority of the Chair. That will not happen.

Mr Attwood: On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: I am not prepared to take a point of order on what I have said, and I shall now move on.

Mr Attwood: I do not believe that it is on a matter that is particular to what you have just said, Mr Speaker. I wish to confirm what you said on 24 November 2009. You ruled:

"On other occasions, as in the past, Members may make remarks or allegations that fall so far short of the standards that I have outlined that I will ask them to withdraw them." — [Official Report, Vol 46, No 2, p81, col 2].

That is the ruling that you made. On a matter of general principle, could I ask you to clarify whether, if a Member were to make a remark in the Chamber —

Mr Speaker: I have said that I am not prepared to open up a debate on the matter. I will judge any remark that is made by any Member from any side of the House. I know where the Member is trying to go, and I would prefer it if he did not go there. I shall now move on. As far as I am concerned, the matter is closed.

Suspension of Standing Orders

The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr S Wilson): I beg to move

That Standing Orders 10(2) to 10(4) be suspended for 22 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 22 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: Transport Sectoral Format

Mr Speaker: I have 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 Cheann Comhairle. In compliance with section 52 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, I wish to make the following statement on the eighth meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) in transport sectoral format, which was held in Newry on Wednesday 3 March 2010. The Minister of the Environment, Edwin Poots MLA, has approved the report, and I make it on his behalf. I chaired the meeting, and the Executive were also represented by Edwin Poots MLA, the Minister of the Environment. The Irish Government were represented by Noel Dempsey TD, the Minister for Transport.

Ministers discussed progress on the Dublin to Belfast rail link and noted that the collapsed viaduct at Malahide was repaired ahead of schedule. We welcomed the increase in passenger numbers on the line since its reopening and the fact that the rail companies intend to keep fare promotions under review. The council noted that the railway companies have produced costed proposals that are under consideration and which are aimed at improving the reliability of trains on the line by improving the viability of the existing fleet.

We also noted that the two railway companies continue to consider fare harmonisation on the Dublin to Belfast rail service. However, the current focus on growth in passenger numbers limits the potential to advance that at present. The development of integrated ticketing systems across the island of Ireland remains a longer-term objective.

Ministers noted the completion of the northern railway corridor development study and the main findings and recommendations of the report. The main focus of the report is on the development potential along the Ballymena to Derry railway line.

The Council noted that contractors had been appointed to the A5 and A8 road projects and that work is progressing to meet the next key

milestone — the publication of the draft Orders — by late 2010 or early 2011. In December 2009, the Minister for Transport made a payment of €9 million to the NI Consolidated Fund in accordance with the agreed arrangements. We also noted that construction work had begun on the two service stations on the M1 at Castlebellingham in County Louth and at Lusk in County Dublin. Those are expected to be open before the end of 2010.

12.15 pm

Ministers discussed road safety issues on rural roads and in border areas and the current position on road fatalities in each jurisdiction. We noted that co-operation on road safety strategies and enforcement actions in both jurisdictions will continue to focus on rural roads, including those in border areas. The Council noted the introduction on 28 January 2010 of the mutual recognition of driver disqualifications between the UK and Ireland. Officials continue to work towards the longer-term objective of the mutual recognition of penalty points. Ministers noted that a pilot scheme for the release of vehicle-keeper data on a cross-border reciprocal basis to bodies enforcing parking and toll penalties was launched earlier that day.

Ministers discussed progress on reducing blood:alcohol limits in both jurisdictions. The Road Traffic Bill 2009 in the South includes proposals to introduce blood-alcohol concentration limits. It was also noted that, following public consultation in Northern Ireland, an options paper is being prepared that will give consideration to a range of policy and legislative options that relate to the setting of new blood:alcohol concentration limits. A co-ordinated approach to the introduction of new limits will continue to be explored. The Council noted that officials from both jurisdictions are meeting to discuss the sharing of information, where appropriate, on the procurement of new breath-testing equipment.

Ministers noted the Department of Transport's publication of the 'National Cycle Policy Framework' as a follow-up to the Smarter Travel policy. They also noted that the Department for Regional Development (DRD), through the Travelwise initiative, actively promotes walking, cycling, public transport and car sharing to businesses, commuters and schools. We also noted that the Department for Regional Development is forming an active travel forum. The Council noted that

officials are actively pursuing a sustainable transport agenda, sharing experiences on issues such as public bike rental schemes and progressing plans for an all-island bike week in 2010, which will take place from 13 June to 20 June. We welcomed that the jointly supported car-sharing website for the north-west region is now operational. An update on that will be provided at a future NSMC meeting in transport sectoral format.

Ministers reviewed the outcome of the initial meeting of the freight forum, which was held in Dublin Castle on 29 January 2010 and was attended by a wide range of stakeholders with an interest in promoting a sustainable freight sector. We noted that officials in the relevant Departments will set up working groups to examine the priority issues that were identified. Those were: the need to be competitive in a sustainable manner; safer, compliant and eco-efficient road freight transport; rail freight and other alternatives; international connectivity; and network management.

The Council noted that construction of the Knocknaginny bridge is under way and construction of the Annaghroe bridge will be under way by mid-March and is expected to be completed by winter 2010. Ministers noted that Louth County Council submitted a report to the Department of Transport regarding the proposed Narrow Water bridge project.

Ministers noted that a pilot scheme for cross-border community-based rural transport was completed at the end of December 2009. A report on the evaluation of the pilot scheme will be presented at the next NSMC meeting in transport sectoral format. The Council agreed to meet again in transport sectoral format in October 2010.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Regional Development (Mr Cobain):

I thank the Minister for his statement. Has he discussed the findings of the 2006 survey of the seabed? Irish Rail's report on the collapsed bridge clearly revealed that Irish Rail engineers did not understand the viaduct structure and how it worked. What steps have been taken to ensure that such an incident cannot happen again, that the health and safety of train travellers are safeguarded and that Translink is protected from further financial losses?

The Minister for Regional Development:

Obviously, safety on the rail networks is the key

priority. As regards the leaked element of that report to the Irish Railway Safety Commission, Iarnród Éireann issued a press release in which it denied that it was oblivious to any difficulties with the viaduct and that it did not understand the structure of the bridge. That is, therefore, a matter of contest between Iarnród Éireann and whoever produced that report to the Railway Safety Commission.

Obviously, there was significant concern about the incident at Malahide. We were pleased that the repair work was done ahead of schedule. Nonetheless, the fact that a bridge such as that collapsed caused significant concern. As a result, there has been a concerted effort to examine carefully all bridges that are partly submerged in water to ensure that the proper safety compliances are met. The safety of that track will certainly be a key focus in the future. Obviously, there is an ongoing programme of maintenance work and checks, and the incident at Malahide brings that into sharp relief. I am sure that it will sharpen the focus in that area of work.

Mr I McCrea: The Minister said that the rail companies continue to consider fare harmonisation and increasing the number of passengers who use the Dublin to Belfast rail service. Can he give us any figures as to what the indicators for the increase have been? Is it still a work in progress? Will he also put out a message on behalf of rail users about the dissident republican activities that closed down the line on such a high usage period as this past weekend?

The Minister for Regional Development:

Passenger numbers dropped by around 60% as a result of the collapse of the Malahide bridge. However, within one week of the bridge reopening, journey numbers were well on their way back to previous levels. Between then and 17 January 2010, passenger journey numbers were higher than in the corresponding weeks in 2008. Those results are very encouraging. However, they were based on some fare reductions.

One of the key impacts on harmonisation is the different currencies and the fluctuation in currency rate. That means that the harmonisation of ticket pricing can be affected by events that are outside the control of the railway companies. That is the difficulty. However, the companies continue to look at that.

I spoke publicly to the media about the closure of the line, yesterday and this morning, to utterly condemn any attacks on it. I made it very clear that I think that such attacks are counterproductive.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a ráiteas ar an tuairisc.

I thank the Minister for his statement on the report of the meeting. I note that the northern railway corridor development plan was tabled, and I am sure that the Minister will keep a keen eye on that as he knows that it is of great interest to the people of the north-west. Is the Minister satisfied that milestones are being met in the A5 north-west gateway project and that the project will continue as promised?

The Minister for Regional Development: The northern corridor railway development study is important, and it is encouraging that all councils along that route value the railway network so highly and have come forward with short- and long-term proposals to enhance the route and to ensure greater usage. Passenger numbers are increasing and a significant capital investment is planned for the track between Coleraine and Derry.

I am pleased to report that milestones on the A5 construction scheme are being met. The next milestone will be in late 2010 with the publication of the draft statutory Orders associated with the environmental statement, the direction Order and the vesting Order. That is likely to lead to the holding of a public inquiry in 2011. Subject to satisfactory progress from draft to statutory procedures, and the confirmation of the availability of funds through the normal budgetary process, it is anticipated that construction could start in 2012 and be completed by 2015.

Mr Gallagher: There are several very encouraging aspects to the report on North/South co-operation on transport and road safety. I want to ask the Minister about the Dublin to Belfast rail link. Were there any discussions about the currency conversions that are used by the catering companies that service the line? There was considerable disparity between the euro and sterling and where the gap has closed, that is not reflected. Something must be done so that passengers, particularly those paying in euro, do not feel that they are being skinned when they ask for a sandwich or a mineral.

I want to ask the Minister about sustainable transport.

Mr Speaker: I encourage the Member to conclude his question.

Mr Gallagher: Will the Minister tell us whether there are any plans whereby we could have a pathfinder town in each jurisdiction that would co-ordinate the sustainable transport strategy with its counterpart on the other side of the border? That would be very useful in areas where there is a considerable amount of daily traffic due to people travelling to and from work.

The Minister for Regional Development: I am quite happy to discuss both issues that the Member raised with the Minister for Transport in the South. The issue of price variation was not specifically discussed in respect of catering on the Enterprise service; it was in relation to the harmonisation of ticket prices. Currency fluctuations have a direct impact on prices. That means that ticket prices would need to change on a regular basis as the differential between sterling and the euro goes up and down, and, presumably, that would be the same for the catering facilities on the Enterprise. We do not want anyone to be left with the sense that they are being taken advantage of as those differentials change, but the Member, as I do, lives in a border area, and will be aware of how often prices fluctuate and that the price of every item would need to change. Fluctuation will present an ongoing difficulty in respect of the harmonisation of prices for tickets, goods and services provided on the Enterprise.

There has been excellent co-operation between Departments, North and South, on sustainable transport. I am quite happy to raise the Member's idea of the twinning of towns, because it has considerable merit. The Member will know that an active travel forum has been established to bring forward recommendations to the Department for an active travel strategy. That is another area in which his suggestion could be useful.

Mr Speaker: I remind all Members that they should ask questions on the Minister's statement, rather than make further statements.

Mr B Wilson: I thank the Minister for his statement, and I look forward to the consequences of the 2006 seabed survey. The disruption of the rail link between Belfast and Dublin has continued, and there have been several disruptions during the past few months. Indeed, at the weekend,

the special trains for fans travelling to the Ireland rugby match in Dublin were cancelled, and the plans of those fans were disrupted. Have there been any discussions about ways in which inconvenience can be reduced when such incidents occur?

The Minister for Regional Development:

The substantial number of disruptions to rail services are beyond the control of the rail companies and are normally the result of security-related issues. The railway line between Dublin and Belfast remains closed and the decision on whether the line can reopen, which will largely be taken by the PSNI, will not be made until tomorrow. The punctuality and reliability of rail services continue to be high, even taking the closures into account, and arrangements kick in immediately after a closure so that people can be bussed around the affected areas to minimise disruption. That is happening today between Newry and Dundalk railway stations.

An early decision was made about the availability of the special rugby trains over the weekend. People were advised about the withdrawal of those services and that alternative arrangements should be made on Friday. There seemed to be a full house at the match at Croke Park on Saturday, and I can only presume that most people managed to make alternative arrangements. Line closures are frustrating and damage the revenue of the railway companies, particularly on rugby weekends, which are big earners for them. There are well-tested means of trying to minimise disruption, but if the line is closed, there is little that can be done other than bussing passengers around the areas affected by closure.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Cuirim fáilte roimh ráiteas an Aire.

I welcome the statement. The Minister highlighted the continuing need for co-operation on road safety. Was there any discussion at the meeting about a role for private firms, such as mobile phone or insurance companies, in the road safety strategies?

The Minister for Regional Development: There was no specific discussion of that nature at the sectoral meeting in Newry. However, road safety is an ongoing matter of co-operation between the Department of the Environment (DOE) in the North and the Department of Transport in the South, and a variety of initiatives have been

adopted. It is very early to claim any successes, but it is to be welcomed that there was a prolonged period in recent times in which there were no deaths on the roads, although there have been several since.

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

The Department of the Environment and the Department of Transport are looking at increasingly innovative ways to try to get the road safety message across, particularly to young people. As I said, the emphasis in the discussion was on rural roads and on roads in border areas, because those are the places where the problem is most persistent and where most of the damage is being done due to accidents. I imagine that both Departments will continue to look at any and every means to improve road safety.

12.30 pm

Mr Kinahan: I thank the Minister for his statement: there is much in it to welcome. I will focus on sustainable transport. Did the Minister discuss with the Republic's Minister of Transport how best to use sustainable transport initiatives on the main routes into Belfast in line with car sharing? We need more funds for park-and-ride schemes, because those are the basis from which car sharing can start.

The Minister for Regional Development: As I said, there is excellent co-operation between both Departments on sustainable transport. We are looking at initiatives in different parts of the island and are sharing experience and best practice.

As I said in my statement, the car-sharing initiative was launched in the north-west. During the first four or five months of the initiative, there were more than 4,500 hits on its website, and more than 100 people have signed up for car sharing between Derry and Letterkenny. That will have an impact on the number of vehicles travelling to Derry each morning.

There has been investment in park-and-ride schemes in the North and in the South, and we continue to share the benefits and experience of those schemes. In Edinburgh last week, I had an opportunity to look at the city's park-and-ride plans to see how people are using sustainable transport initiatives to try to reduce the number of cars that enter major urban areas. Therefore, there are benefits and experiences to be shared

from both sides of the border and from other cities in Britain and elsewhere. We continue to learn from that and try to adopt and apply best practice.

Mr Dallat: I welcome the Minister's statement, and I am particularly pleased that the report of the Northern Corridor Railways Group was discussed. I declare an interest as a member of that group. The Minister is well aware of the work that the group has done, and its report has been noted. Will he indicate how the main findings of the report will be delivered?

The Minister for Regional Development: As the Member said, the report was very much welcomed. Its main aim was to consider the possible long-term social, physical and economic developments that could be achieved by enhancing the railway line between Ballymena and Derry. There were a number of short-term focuses on park-and-ride schemes and ticketing and timetable improvements. A park-and-ride strategic review team has been established and meets regularly to discuss ways of creating more park-and-ride facilities in order to make public transport more available.

There are opportunities to improve ticketing and timetabling arrangements, especially before the planned changes to frequencies take effect due to the introduction to service of new trains and the completion of the Coleraine to Derry track relay.

Therefore, some of the issues raised in the report have been acted on, and opportunities to develop those further will arise. The medium- to long-term opportunities will be addressed in more detail as part of the reviews of the regional development strategy and the regional transportation strategy, and following that, as integrated transport plans are developed.

The reviews will be shared with all relevant Departments, and opportunities, such as the development of tourism linkages, transport hubs, the use of Ministry of Defence sites, airport linkages and potential linkages to waste-management plans, will be taken forward following their completion.

Mr McCallister: The Minister briefly mentioned the report submitted by Louth County Council on the Narrow Water bridge project. Will the Minister give us some of the report's detail and say whether it contained any costings for the project?

On previous occasions, the Minister has said that, with respect to the Narrow Water bridge and the southern relief road projects, it is not an either/or debate. Given the present economic conditions, is it not obvious to the Minister that it is an either/or debate and we should be backing the southern relief road project?

The Minister for Regional Development: I am not aware of the detail of the report because it was not presented to me. The report was presented by Louth County Council, which was commissioned to carry out the report on behalf of the Department of Transport, so, essentially, it is a matter between those two bodies. I expect to receive an update on the report's content and the Department of Transport's plans for that scheme at the next North/South Ministerial Council meeting. It has always been the position that the Department of Transport would wait for the report and would then discuss with us how it plans to progress, if at all, in due course. That remains the position.

Mr P J Bradley: Mr McCallister has beaten me to one of the questions. Nevertheless, I thank the Minister for his statement, which, although it is short in print, is a record of a very intensive meeting. I appreciate that it has taken place.

Before I ask my questions, I join the Minister in condemning the attacks on the railway line. We have endured such pointless attacks for 50 years, and I appeal to the people who are carrying them out to listen to the words of those who repeatedly call for them to cease.

First, was any reference made at the meeting to free travel for companions? The travelling companion of a person in a wheelchair receives free travel when they go from South to North. However, the same does not apply to travel from North to South. Secondly, was any reference made to the restoration of the previously discussed Greencastle to Greenore ferry project? Thirdly, given that —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Members should ask one question only.

Mr P J Bradley: I am entitled to ask more than one question, Mr Deputy Speaker.

What early preparation has the Minister's Department made in advance of the Narrow Water bridge project?

The Minister for Regional Development: I have answered the question about companion

travel previously. The Member will know that we bid for a range of concessionary fares for people with disabilities, and we obtained some concessionary fares for people over the age of 60. That is not reciprocated in the South, where the qualifying age is 65. There are still a number of categories of people with disabilities to which a concessionary fare does not apply. Before we discuss the issue of companion travel, my priority has always been to ensure that all people who are disabled receive concessionary fares. We will continue to argue that case in future budgetary discussions.

The Member asked so many questions that I am starting to lose track. He asked about the Narrow Water bridge project. Roads Service was asked only to share information about some of its studies on the southern relief road, and it did so. As I said, the report is a matter between Louth County Council and the Department of Transport, and it rests with those bodies. I have an understanding with the Minister of Transport that, when he has made his assessment, he will discuss that with us at a North/South Ministerial Council meeting.

The Greencastle to Greenore ferry was not discussed. However, I understand that Louth County Council — it is merely my understanding, I have no written report to that effect — is considering that matter as part of its study on the idea of a Narrow Water bridge.

Mr Ford: I welcome the statement, especially the references to the northern rail corridor. The Minister talked about timetable issues and park-and-ride issues. Is he in a position to give us any news on the proposed park-and-ride facility at Ballymartin, Templepatrick? I join Mr McCartney in welcoming the fact that trains now arrive in Derry before 9.00 am, but does the Minister accept that it means that commuters from Mossley in Antrim have problems arriving in Ballymena for 9.00 am? Will the Minister assure us that the timetables will be looked at before the new rolling stock comes into place?

The Minister for Regional Development: As I said, we will have the opportunity to consider all timetabling issues in advance of the new rolling stock. Moreover, the major investment between Derry and Coleraine will allow us to examine those issues. Of course, it is sometimes a matter of balance, because getting commuters to a certain place will have a knock-on effect on commuters who travel elsewhere. We want

to achieve maximum usage of public transport, and, therefore, we should try to encourage more and more people to use public transport and to benefit the majority who use it. I do not have any specific information about the park-and-ride facility at Templepatrick, but I will correspond with the Member in due course.

Mr Savage: Is the Minister satisfied that enough is being done to encourage greater use of rail services, especially in rural areas? The Minister knows which area I mean. There is a glorious opportunity to expand the service there.

The Minister for Regional Development: I was expecting a question about Scarva railway station at some stage. I had the opportunity to look at the station when I was in Scarva last week. The Department's policy is to find ways to encourage more people to use public transport. However, the Member must bear in mind that if we create more stops along an intercity service such as the Enterprise, we slow that service down and discourage people from using it. There is a balance between finding innovative ways to get people from rural areas to use public transport and ensuring that the big transport initiatives between the two main cities on the island are not slowed down but improved, speeded up and running more frequently.

Executive Committee Business

Waste and Contaminated Land (Amendment) Bill: First Stage

The Minister of the Environment (Mr Poots): I beg to introduce the Waste and Contaminated Land (Amendment) Bill [NIA 10/09], which is a Bill to amend the Waste and Contaminated Land (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 and the Producer Responsibility Obligations (Northern Ireland) Order 1998.

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.

Supply Resolution for the 2010-11 Main Estimates for the Department of Justice, the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister and the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to two hours for the debate. The Minister of Finance and Personnel will have up to 10 minutes to propose the motion and 20 minutes to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who wish to speak will have five minutes.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr S Wilson): I beg to move

That this Assembly approves that a sum, not exceeding £1,432,778,000, be granted out of the Consolidated Fund, for or towards defraying the charges for the Department of Justice, the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister and the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland for the year ending 31 March 2011 and that resources, not exceeding £1,369,871,000, be authorised for use by the Department of Justice, the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister and the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland for the year ending 31 March 2011 as summarised for each Department or other public body in columns 4(b) and 4(a) of table 1.3 in the volume of the Northern Ireland Estimates 2010-11 that was laid before the Assembly on 15 March 2010.

The motion seeks the Assembly's approval for the 2010-11 spending plans that will be inherited by the Executive on the devolution of policing and justice powers on 12 April 2010. Specifically, the plans are in respect of the Department of Justice, the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland and other additional expenditure arising from the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) as a consequence of devolution as set out in the Main Estimates volume, which was laid before the Assembly on 15 March 2010.

On behalf of the Executive, I request and recommend the levels of Supply set out in the resolution under section 63 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. Following the Assembly's agreement on the motion for a resolution on 9 March 2010, requesting that a broad range of policing and justice responsibilities cease to be reserved and be devolved to the Assembly, this motion is an essential stepping stone towards

the completion of the devolution of policing and justice powers. The Supply resolution and the Budget (No. 2) Bill, which I will introduce later today, are an integral part of the devolution of responsibility for policing and justice powers to a locally elected Administration after some 38 years, throughout which responsibility for this important aspect of the governance of Northern Ireland has been held by direct rule Ministers.

This step in that process is necessary, as Northern Ireland Departments do not currently have the statutory authority to spend money on policing and justice matters. Assembly approval of the Supply resolution, the Estimates and the enactment of the associated Budget (No. 2) Bill will provide that authority and allow for expenditure and associated financing of the new Department of Justice, the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland and, in the case of OFMDFM, in respect of those functions occurring as a consequence of the devolution of policing and justice powers from the appointed day of devolution. Although the inherited spending plans do not reflect spending priorities set specifically by the Executive, it is important that the Assembly supports the existing allocations for the financial year 2010-11.

12.45 pm

The Hillsborough Castle Agreement commits to an addendum to the Executive's existing Programme for Government to reflect the extended responsibilities that will shortly devolve to Northern Ireland. The new Justice Minister will draw up the addendum and bring it to the Assembly for approval. However, in future, the Executive will review the spending plans for policing and justice in the context of all their strategic priorities. In that sense, the spending plans before the Assembly today are an interim measure aimed at enabling the smooth transition to the second stage of the devolution of policing and justice powers to Northern Ireland.

Although the spending plans are inherited, that is not to say that the Executive and the Assembly are simply accepting them without question. A detailed review of the financial requirements of the policing and justice bodies was conducted by the Assembly and Executive Review Committee, and extensive negotiations by the First Minister and deputy First Minister resulted in an additional financial package being offered by the Prime Minister on 21

October 2009. That package aims to address any identifiable shortfalls in the current level of funding for policing and justice functions and to provide a secure financial foundation for their devolution. The primary purpose is to ensure that such issues have no impact on other spending areas.

The first of two particular elements that are reflected in the Estimates is a £20 million increase in the baseline for legal aid. As a consequence of negotiations with the Prime Minister, its underfunding, which had been recognised, is now being addressed. The Estimates also reflect a reclassification of police pensions that brings the budgetary treatment of the PSNI pension scheme more into line with that of the police forces in Great Britain. That will stabilise police pension costs and protect the policing budget from the impact of variations in the annual valuations of the scheme liabilities as assessed by the actuary. Other elements of the package will be assessed as and when required and do not, therefore, need to be reflected in the Estimates being considered today.

In moving forward with those new responsibilities, the Executive must examine all their programmes to decide how best to allocate resources in line with their priorities. However, the Executive will need to take an early decision on whether there is merit in the policing and justice budget being ring-fenced in the Northern Ireland Executive Budget for 2010-11, as recommended by the Assembly and Executive Review Committee.

The policing and justice budget that will be transferred is substantial. The future presence of a locally elected Minister, supported by the Assembly and its Committees in developing, scrutinising and prioritising spending proposals, will provide the basis for ensuring that those functions are developed and enhanced to meet the needs of the population of Northern Ireland.

The main purpose of the motion is to seek the Assembly's approval for the use of resources to discharge those new responsibilities in the year ending 31 March 2011. The amounts of cash and resources sought by the motion are in addition to the cash and resources Vote on Account for OFMDFM for 2010-11 in the Budget Act (Northern Ireland) 2010, which was passed by the Assembly in February. The level of resources being sought is summarised in

the Main Estimates volume that was placed before the Assembly on 15 March 2010. The motion also seeks the Assembly's approval for the issue of cash from the Northern Ireland Consolidated Fund for the financial year 2010-11, as detailed in the Estimates volume. The total cash and resources for which approval is sought is significant and will amount to £1,433 billion — sorry, £1.433 billion — and £1.370 billion respectively. I saw Mr Ford's eyes light up there.

The Supply resolution, once approved by the Assembly, will be the precursor to the Budget (No. 2) Bill 2010, which I will introduce to the Assembly later today. Subject to Assembly approval and Royal Assent to enable the Bill to become an Act, it will provide formal legal authority for the Department of Justice, the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland and OFMDFM to incur expenditure in relation to the devolution of justice and policing powers for the 2010-11 financial year.

In that context, I record my thanks to the Committee for Finance and Personnel for its approval of the use of accelerated passage for the Budget (No. 2) Bill. As Members will be aware, accelerated passage is the normal procedure for Budget Bills because they require Royal Assent within a short timescale. However, on this occasion, I propose an additional acceleration of the Bill. For that to happen, I will ask Members to support a further motion on the suspension of Standing Orders 31(d), 37, 39(1) and 42(5) in respect of the passage of the Budget (No. 2) Bill (Northern Ireland) 2010.

The suspension of those Standing Orders removes any reference to Further Consideration from Standing Orders and does away with the minimum 10-day period for the Bill's passage through the Assembly. It will mean that the Bill will pass through the Assembly over two days. That is unavoidable because, until the vote was taken on the 9 March Assembly resolution, we could not be sure that the powers would be devolved.

The spending plans are detailed in the Main Estimates volume. I do not propose to go through that material in any detail, although I will endeavour to answer any questions that Members may have. However, I hope that Members will appreciate that due to the fact that the Department of Justice and Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland

come with inherited spending plans, and the underlying detail reflects decisions taken by the Secretary of State and the Northern Ireland Court Service, I may not be able to respond to every specific query in detail. In such cases, where appropriate, I will arrange for written responses to be made.

The motion is a significant milestone in the completion of the devolution of these important responsibilities. The Justice Minister will commence work on the development of an addendum to the Programme for Government. In that context, the Executive and the Assembly will, in future, be able to better reflect their priorities in this important area.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel (Ms J McCann): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Senior Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) officials briefed the Committee for Finance and Personnel on 10 March in relation to the Main Estimates for 2010-11 and the associated Budget (No. 2) Bill, which gives legislative effect to the Main Estimates, the Department of Justice, the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister and the Public Prosecution Service following the transfer of policing and justice powers to the Assembly. The Bill will be introduced to the Assembly following this debate.

The Committee was advised that although the Main Estimates have been drawn up on the basis of existing spending plans, two areas have been adjusted slightly as a result of the devolution package. Therefore, it has been necessary to build provision for police pensions into the Main Estimates, and a further £20 million has been added to the baseline for legal aid. I note that DFP officials indicated that an adjustment will be factored in for a George Cross museum.

Provision has also been made within the Supply resolution for the Main Estimates in relation to the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister for the purpose of gaining statutory authority for two new functions, namely the office of the Attorney General and the Judicial Appointments Commission. OFMDFM will not, therefore, be included in the Main Estimates that are to be brought forward later this year. Any necessary changes will be made through next year's spring Supplementary Estimates. The Committee was also advised by DFP

officials that it will be a matter for the Executive as to whether the total budget allocated to the Department of Justice will be ring-fenced or the Department will be subject to the in-year monitoring process in line with other Departments.

The Committee looks forward to the new Department of Justice receiving the same level of financial scrutiny as existing Departments, both from the Committee for Justice and the Department of Finance and Personnel. On behalf of the Committee, I support the motion.

Mr Shannon: I support the motion. It is important for us all to recognise what this will deliver. Recently, I nominated an officer serving in my area to be police officer of the year, and that is important for a number of reasons. The officer is well known to me, an elected representative. He has worked with my office for many years. Any time I request his co-operation, I find him conscientious, friendly and efficient, and he handles every issue with sensitivity and the utmost confidentiality. I have the highest regard for that officer in every respect, and I wish that there were 50 just like him in my constituency. This motion gives us an opportunity to secure the jobs of a great many officers and, perhaps, offer employment to many others.

This officer is known throughout the town, and people from all areas recognise and, more importantly, respect him. His commitment to the community has reaped many rewards in the form of great community relations and the sort of working relationship that is essential with elected representatives and the community.

How does he achieve that? Recently, I had to fight for this officer to retain his position as community officer amid financial cutbacks. For that reason, this funding, and the security that it gives 1,200 officers on the streets, is essential to our communities. People have come into my office and asked me to ensure that we retain and enhance policing on the streets, and this is exactly what the motion will do.

In the 'Belfast Telegraph' today, there is the sad story of a lady from my area, Ruby Jamison, who was robbed by two masked men some time ago. She was traumatised and police officers helped her and were very conscientious and responsive. She died shortly after the robbery. If we can make policing better and take the important initiatives through the budget that we have, is that not what we should be doing?

I believe that it is, and this will give us an opportunity to address —

Mr B McCrea: Does the Member accept that, to a large extent, policing has been devolved and the Policing Board on which his colleagues sit is responsible for that budget? I am sure that the Member will join with me in saying that that body has done a good job.

Mr Shannon: I thank the Member for his contribution. It is nice to hear him speak. During the last debate on this subject, he did not bother. We welcome his comments. I accept that they are honest and heartfelt. This debate is about a budget that will deliver for the next few years. That is what we are about.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: Will the Member give way?

Mr Shannon: Absolutely. How could I not give way to the Minister?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: Should the Member not express some surprise at the comments made by the Member for Lagan Valley:

“to a large extent, policing has been devolved”?

When it came to a debate in this House, that Member and his party voted against the devolution of policing and justice on the basis that we are not yet ready for it, and yet he says that it has been devolved and is working very well.

Mr Shannon: I thank the Minister for his intervention.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member may have an extra minute.

Mr Shannon: I need an extra three or four minutes.

Mr B McCrea: Will the Member give way again, so that I might respond to the Minister's point?

Mr Shannon: No, I will not. I have no time left. You will have your chance to come in, Basil. I want to touch on a couple of things that I think are important.

One of the things that will come out of this motion is compensation for those officers who have suffered hearing loss. It is vital that we have that in place. I know a great many officers who have lost their hearing. I am not being condescending, but they are as deaf

as a post as a result of what happened to them. This gives them an opportunity to have compensation. The pension fund for part-time Reserve officers will also be properly provided for. The men and women who spent endless nights patrolling our streets at the height of the Troubles, some of whom were forced to move homes, and the families of those officers who made the ultimate sacrifice, will receive the pension that they should have received a long time ago. The Compensation Agency will have adequate funding to ensure that it can carry out its job of allocating funding to those who need it most, through the Department of Justice. Money is set aside for legal aid.

I have seen examples in my office of people who have applied for legal aid and did not get it. I know of young working mothers who look after their children single-handedly and without financial aid from partners, who were asked to pay £10,000 for fact-finding cases, on top of their household bills. That is impossible for them.

Legal aid enables them, and those who most need legal aid, and I welcome that as well. That is only one example; there are a great many others, and I am glad that the budget will enable legal aid to be given on a larger scale to those who need it.

1.00 pm

The Prison Service and the Youth Justice Agency will also benefit from devolution. A new probation and youth justice office will shortly open in Newtownards, not as a result of this budget, but coming through from it. However, the budget will enable that service to continue to deliver in the area that I represent. Local representatives were involved in allocating some of the money that is badly needed to bring the Prison Service and Youth Justice Agency up to scratch in health and safety and effectiveness.

The budget enables the Minister to make available the finance to deliver policing and justice. I urge Members to support the motion. I would be glad to get the support of everyone in the Chamber, and I am sure that the Ulster Unionists will give their support. It is a pity that they were not there to support us last time around. Nevertheless, it is good to have the Johnny-come-latelys come now, which is always important.

Mr McNarry: In response to the Minister's rather mischievous comment about my good friend and colleague Basil McCrea, it should be recognised that the motion heralds only the end of the internal political debate about devolving policing and justice; it starts the actual process of devolving finances to the Assembly.

I am struck by how many issues are still not resolved. We are hurtling towards the devolution of policing and justice without resolution on a number of key issues that may well have a significant impact on the suitability of the budget that we are being asked to approve. The Supply resolution allows for moneys to be drawn down from the Consolidated Fund into the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister. However, there are still considerable reservations about the role of the Attorney General. Mr John Larkin QC seems to have been working with the First Minister and deputy First Minister to write his own job description. However, no one in the Chamber, unless the Minister of Finance and Personnel tells us today, is any the wiser. Will he confirm, for example, that he is happy with the financial settlement worked out for the role of the Attorney General?

It is my understanding that there was considerable disagreement among the Assembly and Executive Review Committee about the justice sector of the North/South Ministerial Council arrangements for dealing with policing and justice. Again, we are being asked to agree to funds being drawn down from the Consolidated Fund to cover an issue about which there is still considerable uncertainty. Perhaps the Minister will enlighten us about that.

I welcome the fact that the Northern Ireland Executive will have access to the national reserve to meet any exceptional security pressures on policing and justice. In light of the ongoing national debt problems, is the Minister confident that the promise of access to the reserve during the next comprehensive spending review is a copper-fastened guarantee?

There was no consensus among Assembly and Executive Review Committee members on parading. That is disappointing. Again, we are being asked to agree a budget on an issue that has the potential to suffer from selective disruptive targeting. With the increased level of dissident threat, there is much concern among communities that we are heading towards

renewed tactical violence controlled to cause maximum community tensions.

While the motion will secure some certainty for the next financial year, it also illustrates to us how unprepared we are for the devolution of policing and justice, how many outstanding issues there are and how uncertain things will be after 2012. We cannot forget that we are entering into the most fiscally uncertain period that this Assembly has known. In May 2012, the sunset clause will also kick in, and the institutions will be thrown into further turmoil, because we believe, and the public share our view, that we cannot go on for ever in placing a political party with no democratic mandate into the role of Justice Minister. Let us hope that we do not do that in the next couple of weeks.

Given that the Assembly's will on the devolution of policing and justice has already been recorded, we will not stand in the way of the motion today. However, we have serious reservations about how the Department of Justice will work and its medium- and long-term future. In light of the number of uncertainties that exist and the Executive's continuing dysfunctionality, I reiterate that the time is not right for the devolution of policing and justice. That is our opinion and it is on the record. On behalf of the people of Northern Ireland, and to ensure that we end up with as stable and secure a situation as possible in forthcoming months, the Ulster Unionist Party will continue to raise its concerns about the issue.

Mr O'Loan: I am pleased to speak on the Supply resolution to approve funding for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, the Department of Justice and the Public Prosecution Service (PPS). Each legislative stage in the Assembly brings us a step closer to the devolution of policing and justice, which I greatly welcome. However, I do not welcome how the process is being carried out, and many of its outcomes are not in the best interests of uniting our society.

Financial matters require close scrutiny not just at the outset, as we are doing today, but on an ongoing basis, particularly through the relevant Committees. The Committee for Finance and Personnel was told that the spending plans have been inherited. The figures were arrived at individually by OFMDFM, the Department of Justice and the PPS; they were not arrived at through the normal process, which closely

involves the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP). At times, some of us have concerns about DFP's scrutiny and views, but the figures have not even undergone that level of scrutiny. They were merely presented to DFP for approval. Indeed, it would be fair to describe them as having been rubber-stamped by DFP, which is all the more reason why scrutiny will be required during the year to see what lessons can be learned and to determine the implications for future Budgets.

A fundamental question, which the Minister referred to at the outset, arises about the extent to which justice funds, dispersed throughout the two Departments, can be fully ring-fenced. What will happen when in-year pressures occur when money is freed-up? Will there be flexibility to vire across broad headings? Will such funds enter the monitoring rounds? What will happen to capital funds that are not spent; will those be lost to Northern Ireland temporarily or permanently? I hope that the Minister will clarify his views on those matters so that Members will be able to comment on his plans. What is the long-term future for policing and justice money? Will it become a collective part of the block grant and be subject to Executive discretion? Those are very important questions for the future.

That brings me to the second area that I want to address. Our policing and justice needs are closely connected to policies, strategies and outcomes in other areas. Even within justice and policing, success in one area can reduce pressure in another. If we have a more effective prison and probation system, and I may come back to the prisons issues in a later debate, we can reduce offending, particularly reoffending. That has obvious implications — in this case, benign ones — for the level of policing that is needed and the demands on the courts system.

More broadly, the extent to which society is stable and settled has huge implications for justice and policing. If mayhem breaks out on our streets or if dissident activity persists or increases, there will be huge demands on the resources on which we are voting today. Our politics are not shared, and that sets the tone for the rest of society. That point cannot be overstated. Funding for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister may have to cover mechanisms to deal with parades, which is still a reserved function, so what we do to address the parades problem is central

to the discussion. On all of those issues, I am pessimistic.

We are told that a cohesion, sharing and integration strategy has been agreed. I have not seen it, and my party's Minister, my party leader, has not seen it. Therefore, what confidence can I have in it? Given the approaches that the two parties in OFMDFM adopted in the past, I am sceptical that we will have a strategy that truly represents a shared society rather than a shared-out one. Some in the Chamber are prepared to accept a cheque without having seen it first. However, my party and I are not.

I draw similar conclusions when I see how parades are being handled. For that issue to have climbed its way to the top of the political agenda again is a tribute to political failure in those places where the responsibility for parades lies. We are told, again, that a deal has been done. The Orange Order has seen that deal, but I, as an elected Member of the Assembly, have not, and I am entitled to feel angry about that and to feel —

Mr B McCrea: I do not want to interrupt the Member's flow, but he may also wish to deal with the point that we have suspended Standing Orders, meaning that we will not have the Final Consideration Stage of the Bill. Therefore, we are being asked to consider these issues with about five minutes of discussion, even though there is a whole range of issues that we really ought to be talking about in the House.

Mr Deputy Speaker: For clarification, we have not suspended that particular Standing Order at this point.

Mr B McCrea: I beg your pardon, Mr Deputy Speaker; I thought that I heard you read a list —

Mr Shannon: That was for the afternoon.

Mr Spratt: You thought wrong.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The suspension of that Standing Order concerned the length of time that is to be allowed for today's proceedings; it was not to do with this particular issue.

Lord Morrow: When you are wrong, do not compound it.

Mr B McCrea: Don't you bother to tell me that.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr O'Loan: I repeat the point: we are told that, behind closed doors, some form of deal has been done on parades and that the Orange Order, behind its closed doors, has seen and discussed that deal. However, I, as an elected Member of the Assembly, have not seen that deal. The implications of that for the quality of our democracy are immense. I am seriously concerned about our approach to politics here and about the implications for justice and policing.

Therefore, I support 100% this step on the way to the devolution of justice and policing powers.

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

Mr O'Loan: However, I am fearful for the kind of society in which the justice and policing agencies will have to operate.

Dr Farry: The Alliance Party will support the legislation through all its stages in the next couple of days, including its accelerated passage — or should I say warp-speed passage, because the light probably escapes Mr McNarry's black hole.

First, it is important to acknowledge that a generous financial package is available from the UK Government. That, of course, addresses only legacy issues in four key areas; it does not address the ongoing or future pressures that may emerge in the system. Nonetheless, it is important to recognise that.

The Ulster Unionist Party, which lectures us about the fiscal difficulties that all Governments face, should recognise that, had the Assembly followed that party's advice two weeks ago, we would have no financial package at all and that our justice system would face quite chronic fiscal problems. Ironically, we today have the Ulster Unionists' so-called partners, the Conservative Party, voting yes to the deal in the House of Commons, while the UUP continues to pose problems here in the Assembly.

The spending profile on policing and justice in Northern Ireland is obviously very different to that elsewhere in the UK. In some respects, that may be justifiable because of the circumstances that are faced in Northern Ireland, such as the ongoing problem of terrorism and providing justice in a divided society, for example. We must tackle those issues as we try to normalise this society, and there are inefficiencies in other aspects of the justice budget that we should try to face up to in the very near future.

Of course, breathing space is needed to allow for reforms, and any notion of trying to ring-fence this budget over the forthcoming financial year would be welcome. By the same token, we must be realistic and recognise that reforms are required and are, indeed, inevitable. Any breathing space that the Executive grant to the Department of Justice, especially initially, must be used wisely to bring forward sensible reforms that not only use resources more efficiently and effectively but deliver a better justice product for the people of Northern Ireland.

The devolution of policing and justice powers provides the advantage of enabling MLAs from all parties to better scrutinise policy issues and financial matters. Therefore, if there are concerns —

1.15 pm

Mr A Maginness: The Member rightly states that this Assembly will be able to scrutinise various aspects of policing and justice. However, there is an extreme lack of accountability when it comes to the Public Prosecution Service and there is lack of capacity to scrutinise it.

Dr Farry: I am grateful to the Member for his intervention. I do not disagree with the points that he made. Elected representatives should be able to enquire about the financial management of the PPS and its policies, such as when and when not to prosecute, and about items that are referred to as being in the public interest. However, it is important that we take a hands-off approach when it comes to the operational independence of the DPP with respect to individual decisions about whether to prosecute. It is important that those are not perceived to be influenced by any political considerations.

Returning to finances more generally; we have the opportunity to engage in detailed scrutiny over the coming months and years. Today, the situation is almost parallel with that in 2007, when we inherited budgets that had been set under direct rule. From this point onwards, we are on our own with respect to doing things differently and setting different policies and priorities. We can do things differently and better with the resources available. Ultimately, this is about people feeling safer at home and on the streets and about building a more secure society. However, to use resources more efficiently, we will need to put greater focus on early intervention and better joined-

up government, for which devolution provides opportunities. Over the coming months, Departments can look at their budgets to see whether they can make changes in order to engage better with the Department of Justice and achieve more rounded outcomes. As Mr O'Loan stated, there are areas in which things can be done differently and better. It is important that Departments are prepared to think creatively. So far, I have not seen much evidence of Departments seeing justice as a new opportunity to address some of the cost pressures that they and we, as a society, face.

Things can also be done differently and better with respect to community planning. There is no doubt that the Department of Justice will seek to establish new crime reduction partnerships, but those have to be part of a wider community planning model, and the DOE has to bring that model forward as part of the review of public administration (RPA). Neighbourhood renewal should also be brought under that umbrella so that everything is going in the one direction. This is about improving community safety.

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

Dr Farry: I acknowledge the role of the Assembly and Executive Review Committee and the detailed work of the Economic Research Institute of Northern Ireland (ERINI). I look forward to commenting further as the debate goes on.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Before I call the next Member to speak, I remind Members to switch off mobile phones, which are interfering with the sound system. Valuable speeches could be lost.

Mr Weir: Indeed, Mr Deputy Speaker; it would be a travesty for future generations if any words of this debate were lost. I am sure that none of us in this Chamber, not least the Minister, wishes to become one of the first victims of the new Department of Justice under some form of prosecution.

I welcome the Supply resolution that is before us today and the fact that there appears to be some level of consensus. It may be a bit difficult to realise that consensus has emerged given the level of begrudgery that we have heard from the Ulster Unionists and the SDLP. However, I note that Ulster Unionist Party Members indicated that they do not intend to divide the House on this issue and that they support the proposals. Indeed, having ripped the back out of the

motion for about five minutes, Declan O'Loan finished with the slightly surprising statement that he supports it 100%. I look forward to such unqualified support for this issue in the future. The Minister correctly highlighted that, in many ways, it is an inherited budget by virtue of the way in which divisions have been made between different sectors in the policing and justice budget. When any new function is taken over, the budgetary position is inherited, but I join with others in hoping that the opportunity for the Assembly to control policing and justice will lead to a more imaginative use of money in the future.

We would all welcome a more joined-up approach to justice and early intervention, both of which have been mentioned. As well as leading to a reduction in crime, those approaches could be financially beneficial to Northern Ireland. Although direct rulers ultimately drafted the budget, Members of this House had some influence, and, indeed, it bears the fingerprints of the First Minister. The Assembly and Executive Review Committee conducted an extensive exercise, in conjunction with various justice agencies, to try to identify any future problems, such as a funding shortfall. That exercise also sought to identify any black holes — to use the phrase so keenly used by the Member for Strangford Mr McNarry — and to try to ensure that they were filled before we reached any devolved settlement.

A long list was drawn up, and the items on it were gradually ticked off during negotiations with the British Government and the Treasury. The carving of the cake at that level may bear the imprint of the NIO. Undoubtedly, however, the negotiations by the First Minister and deputy First Minister with the Prime Minister mean that we have a bigger cake to carve, which is welcome, and a sound financial position on which to move forward.

The Minister mentioned a couple of issues. A massive difference of about £100 million is linked to shifting police pensions from the departmental expenditure limit to annually managed expenditure. Actuaries relate that to people living longer and the fact that the number of police pensions will be disproportionately high in Northern Ireland compared with anywhere else in the UK. That would have placed an increased financial burden on the police budget and resulted in their having to cut numbers, and so forth. Had the overall financial package

not been accepted, as some Members would have preferred — indeed, some would have completely rejected the devolution of policing and justice powers — it would ultimately have led to the loss of 1,200 police officers across Northern Ireland. Those were the financial implications of rejecting that package, but we have now secured something for the future, particularly in respect of police pensions.

The focus has almost always been on the policing side, but there have been various problems on the justice side too. There were already problems with legal aid 15 years ago, when I was a barrister, and those problems gradually built up over the years. However, legal aid is now in a stronger financial position, and the people who trot into Mr Shannon's office may feel that they are on a more secure basis in that respect.

Among the fluff that was presented, Mr McNarry said that it was good that we have a national reserve to draw on but asked how we could rely on that in the future. Negotiations took place with the Prime Minister, but we also sought and secured the assurance of Mr Cameron, his leader in waiting, that he would stand over any agreement.

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

Mr Weir: Therefore, it is strange that Mr McNarry seems to place little credit in that assurance.

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

Mr Weir: I wonder whether he will be similarly disparaging about Mr Cameron during the forthcoming election.

Mr A Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. On behalf of Sinn Féin, I support the resolution. Notwithstanding the fact that other parties again levelled criticisms today, they said that they will support the motion. Indeed, notwithstanding any party's views on the issue of the devolution of powers, the Assembly has decided that the transfer will proceed. Therefore, it is wholly appropriate that all Members give their support to ensure that the required budget will be available to the new Department and that all the necessary preparations to ensure a smooth transition to the devolution of policing and justice powers will be made. It is all well and good for people to criticise, as long as they support the resolution.

People have tried to rehash some of the old, and mostly failed, arguments. For instance, one Member asked what would happen if there was greater trouble on our streets or a greater threat to society. As has been mentioned, there will be access to the financial reserve. Other Members said that they had not had time to scrutinise the figures and that it is an inherited budget. During devolution, we always had inherited budgets. It has been estimated that it takes some 18 months for any previous budget to wash through the system, regardless of whether such a budget was imposed under direct rule or devolution. The budgets that we establish, with our own integrity, take the same length of time to come through the system. Therefore, there is no difference in how this budget and previous departmental budgets were transferred across into devolution.

Some Members said that they had not had the chance to scrutinise the figures; I think that Mr O'Loan referred to that. Other Members rightly mentioned that the Policing Board has statutory responsibility over policing and the policing budget. Mr O'Loan's colleague Mr Attwood, who is a Member of the House, chairs the Policing Board's resources and improvement committee, which deals with the PSNI budget. Therefore, his colleagues on the Policing Board will have plenty of opportunities to scrutinise the budgetary decisions because, unlike the scrutiny Committee here, it has statutory authority over the matter.

There is also the question about what will happen to the overall budget in the long run. Mr O'Loan's party is represented in the Executive, so that party will be able to input directly into that type of discussion at Executive level. A scrutiny Committee will also be established, and the Member's party will be afforded representation on that Committee to scrutinise the ongoing work of the Department, how budgets may be spent, and so on. I hope, and I have no doubt, that there will be lengthy and considered debates. I look forward to important debates in the time ahead, not only on the budget but on the delivery of a system of policing and justice in a modern society that will be more responsive to the needs of the people whom we represent.

I support the motion. I look forward to a smooth transition, which will be facilitated by the vote being passed.

Mr B McCrea: As has been said by my colleague Mr McNarry, we have certain reservations about the issue, but we have taken on board the fact that the decision has been made by the Assembly. We will, therefore, support the motion.

However, our concerns stem largely from the fact that we think that the House, with a few notable exceptions, is totally unprepared for the challenge that it faces. I do not say that to slight individuals here but because of the sheer volume of information that has to be processed. I do not know whether other members of the Policing Board have similar worries to mine, but I am concerned about the PPS budget, the cost of legal aid and the volume of paperwork in our policing system. A range of areas needs to be addressed.

That brings me to the reason why I rose when Mr Shannon was speaking. I have much respect for the amount of work that Mr Shannon does, but he seems to take a different position to that of others. I say that because the Minister intervened. On the one hand, Mr Shannon appeared to be saying that he was looking forward to the budget because it might provide more money to enhance policing in his part of the world. Surely we would all subscribe to that. However, the Minister suggested that the PSNI budget should be ring-fenced because it might come under pressure. I may have got that wrong, so he may clarify, if necessary. I think that it was Mr Weir who said that this is about carving up the cake and that we got a bigger cake. I am concerned that we are making decisions on large numbers without understanding the impact and the knock-on effects. I would appreciate some time for an understanding of that.

Mr A Maskey: Will the Member reflect on the fact that the Assembly and Executive Review Committee, of which two of his party colleagues, one of whom is his party's deputy leader, are members, had lengthy discussions on the financial aspects of the devolution and policing and justice powers? I do not recall the Member's party colleagues raising those concerns, particularly about legal aid, at that meeting. Will the Member reflect on that with his colleagues?

1.30 pm

Mr B McCrea: I will reflect on it. My understanding is that my colleagues were concerned about those issues. My general point is that because

so much information was brought to bear, it was quite difficult to process.

I am interested in the pension aspect of the budget. The Policing Board, of which I am a member, discussed the total budget, which is around £1.2 billion. Of that sum, £450 million is for pensions and only £500 million is for day-to-day running costs and pay for serving officers. That leaves around £170 million for discretionary spending. When one looks at what pensions will cost, why they are a problem, and whether they should be included in annually managed expenditure — I understand that particular point — the question is that if provision must be made for hearing-loss claims, how can the estimated £400 million be found from a budget of £170 million? People have put forward the case that this is new and additional money, which is erroneous. It was a legal obligation. It had to be done. One could say the same about national pay bargaining and all other such issues. The central tenet of my party's argument is that those are big figures —

Mr Weir: Will the Member give way?

Mr B McCrea: I am sorry: I must carry on.

The important issue is that those are big sums that will have knock-on effects, which the Assembly has not had the opportunity to scrutinise, understand and get to grips with properly.

Given that the central tenet of the Minister's argument is that this is a handover period and the Assembly must just take the budget that it is given and work through it, my party is prepared to support the Supply resolution on that basis. However, I point out that many issues, some of which were raised by Mr O'Loan, have not been resolved. The Assembly simply does not know what it is being asked to spend money on, how it is to spend that money, or why it is being asked to do so. My colleague raised the issue of the Attorney General. The Assembly has yet to deal with many issues.

The Minister rose to take exception with and to make a little dig, which is, of course, quite acceptable, at my party's position on policing and the different stance that it took on the devolution of policing and justice. His point was just that: many people do not understand the difference. My party sees policing as an operational matter that is under the control of

the Policing Board, with the Chief Constable having sole responsibility for operational matters.

However, the Assembly is now looking at how it will change the Budget in order to find additional resources for the areas that need them. The issue of access to the national reserve has been raised. Of course, that will be subject to negotiations at the time. It will depend on the emergency and the case that the Assembly makes.

Although my party does not expect the Government to turn down resources that are needed badly, it is unsure about whether the Assembly is able to make a difference yet and show Northern Ireland's people what devolution enables it to do. However, on that basis, and with those caveats, my party will aid the Assembly in its deliberations and will support the motion.

Mr Attwood: I want to raise a certain number of issues and questions for the Minister about the Supply resolution. In his opening remarks, the Minister said, fairly, that the Executive will review the budget for the devolution of policing and justice in the context of strategic priorities and will consider whether there is merit in ring-fencing the budget for 2010-11. Those are critical issues. In order to convey how critical they are, I want to raise certain matters with the Minister.

The Minister will know from his days on the Policing Board that delay and doubts about the building of a police college continue to endure to a certain degree. However, the stage has been reached at which definitive decisions, for want of a better term, must be made. Planning applications are about to be lodged. A much more significant amount of money will have to be spent than the £3 million that has been spent to date if the police college is to proceed.

Given that those decisions are imminent, as are many other capital decisions, will the Minister indicate his Department's thinking on going to the Executive, following the devolution of justice and policing, to decide whether those matters are to be progressed. Time is very short; decisions on whether projects such as the police college and the prison are to proceed must be made in a matter of weeks. It is only fair that given that the Minister has raised those matters, he share with the Assembly his thinking on how projects on the capital side, including the police college — never mind all the wider capital projects across Departments

— will be managed immediately after the devolution of justice and policing.

Dr Farry: I am grateful to the Member for giving way. Does the Member agree that the Health Department needs to come to a very speedy conclusion on its contribution to any future college at Desertcreat?

Mr Attwood: I thank the Member for that intervention. The reason why I raised that point is that given the uncertainty about the £300 million from the Health Department, and given that the police college project will not proceed unless that money is forthcoming, we need to know today not just what money is coming across, but how the Minister plans to manage that money and how the Executive plan to manage the capital budget generally. That must be considered in the context of the Minister having advised the Assembly a number of weeks ago that he anticipates a 6% to 7% cut in capital spend and in the capital budget following the election.

I agree with Mr McNarry about provision for the Attorney General. In the grand scheme of things, a budget of £1 million a year is not excessive, given that the devolution of justice budget will be £1.4 billion. Nonetheless, is the Minister satisfied that six months after the Attorney General-designate passed a paper to OFMDFM, nobody in this Building who has a right to see that paper — be it the OFMDFM Committee, which is to provide the money, or the Assembly and Executive Review Committee, which has to make certain decisions around that office — has seen that paper?

Minister, that is six months, 180 days, and given that the devolution debate is scheduled for 12 April, 20 days before the Attorney General-designate takes up his post, and we still do not know why £1 million has to be spent on the Attorney General's office. We do not know why 20 staff may have to be employed or why five of those staff will be grade 5 and above. We do not know why the Attorney General believes that he should have offices in the city centre and only a touchdown office up here in the Assembly.

Given the Minister's commitment to efficiency, effectiveness and proper spending of the budget, does he believe that it is efficient and effective that all of us are unsighted in relation to that detail? It may be necessary to employ 20 people, spend £1 million or have facilities downtown so that the Attorney General is in his

comfort zone around the Bar library and the courts of justice. However, we have a right to that information, to have that detail and to know whether the plan is efficient and effective.

As the Minister will be aware, under devolution, it will be DFP — his Department — that will fund the PPS. The SDLP does not agree with that; we believe that the Justice Department was the natural, organic place for funding. That arrangement raises all sorts of potential tensions and conflicts, given that responsibility for administration and finance may fall to the Committee for Finance and Personnel, the wider power of the Assembly in respect of any other matter that the PPS handles, and given the protocol on the Public Prosecution Service, drafted by the British Government —

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

Mr Attwood: That protocol basically creates all sorts of arm's-length arrangements between the Assembly, the Finance and Personnel Ministry, the Justice Ministry and the PPS office, which, in my view, are excessive.

Mr Ford: As others have said, the fact that we are, for the first time, debating a Supply resolution related to justice issues means that there is a significant opportunity for scrutiny by this Assembly. However, as has also been said, the position in which the Justice Department and the justice agencies are in is exactly the same position that every other Department and the other public agencies were in three years ago. Having been presented with it by the Minister, what we are effectively looking at is a rollover budget from the NIO days.

The matter will have to be followed through in some greater detail by the Assembly, whether by a Justice Committee, the Finance and Personnel Committee or the Assembly and Executive Review Committee, which may continue to have a role as we examine how the budget should move forward in the coming years.

As has been highlighted, there is no doubt that by the standards of current British Treasury operations, we have an extremely generous package for dealing with the past, which would have been lost had we not taken the opportunity to devolve justice powers at this stage. However, the package deals only with the past. It is not, in any sense, one that goes generously towards the future.

Mr B McCrea: If money had not been found for police officers' hearing loss, how would it have been dealt with, given that dealing with it is a legal requirement?

Mr Ford: It is absolutely clear from what has been said by Ministers in this place, Ministers in Westminster and others that money had to be found to deal with hearing loss. There was no special arrangement. Therefore, it would have been deducted from the existing budget, with all the effects that that would have had, including a potential reduction in the large number of police officers required to serve the current needs of the people of Northern Ireland. The Minister has outlined that point, and I endorse it. We would clearly have been in major difficulties if that package had not gone through at this stage.

Although the package deals with some of those past issues, such as hearing loss, equal pay and addressing legal aid in the short term, it will not, in any sense, provide an easy road for the future. We have the addition of a modest sum to the baseline expenditure, which, if we are not careful, could easily be taken up by the pressures on the legal aid system, never mind anything else, and that is not a large section of the overall justice budget. Therefore, we need to ensure that the budget that is carried through now is administered effectively and efficiently. Given the difficulties that will arise in the first year of devolution, a lot will have to be done to deal with that.

1.45 pm

There are several issues around at the moment. A major issue is the large section of the justice budget that will immediately be swallowed up by the Police Service and, as other Members have highlighted, commitments on salaries and pensions, which allow no opportunity for free money. In particular, the Police Service, despite what the Chief Constable and others might wish, is bound to a particular number of officers at this stage, which may or may not be the necessary number as we move into the future. Difficult issues will have to be tackled there. MLAs and other public representatives need to face the fact that keeping a police station open in every village is not a good use of public resources, given the pressures that we now face. There are real issues about what contributes to making a safer society, rather than maintaining the previous and ongoing patterns.

The number of people in prison in Northern Ireland is a major challenge. Each year, our prisoner costs are significantly higher than those of any other jurisdiction in these islands, yet there is a historical legacy that has not, so far, proven to be easy to tackle and which may continue to be a difficulty, depending on the number and type of prisoners that the Prison Service has to continue to deal with. There is an issue around legal aid, which has shown a temporary and short-term easing of the burden. However, if action is not taken urgently, and if it is not recognised that that action has to be taken urgently, the Assembly will be in serious difficulties in two or three years' time.

As Alex Attwood highlighted, there are major issues around capital schemes, including IT schemes that may be of a lesser scale than the scheme that he highlighted, the new college at Desertcreat. That college is sometimes referred to as the police college, but it will also be used by the Prison Service and the Fire Service, which tends to be forgotten. Those issues lead to the whole question of the necessity of partnership working between those Departments and agencies that have been devolved for the past three years and the new Justice Department and the justice agencies that we hope to see devolved on 12 April. Whatever may have been done by one wing of the Ulster Conservatives and Unionists — New Force (UCUNF) in this Building a few weeks ago, we may take it that the other wing of UCUNF will be ensuring that justice will be devolved in a vote today in Westminster.

That will lead to real questions as to how every Minister in this place participates in the necessary partnership, because providing a safer community in Northern Ireland is much more than the job of the formal justice agencies. A lot more needs to be done on partnership working and ensuring that other agencies, such as those dealing with mental health or the Youth Service, are fully engaged with the aspects of the criminal justice system where there is major impact and where we need much greater working together to maximise the use of the relatively limited resources that are outlined in the Supply resolution.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I

thank all Members who took part in this short debate. Many of the points that were made will probably raise their heads again several times today and tomorrow. I am sure that it will be an

environmentally friendly debate with recycled points.

As Mr McNarry said, this is the end of the internal debate on whether policing and justice powers should be devolved. Now we are beginning the process of dealing with the powers that we have voted to be devolved here in Northern Ireland. We are, at least, starting off on a more sound financial footing than would have been the case had the negotiations with the Prime Minister not taken place. At the time, some people criticised my party leader for the length of time that those negotiations took, but the work that was done last autumn provided a firm foundation.

That does not mean — to draw on Mr Ford's point — that we should be complacent about the issues that face policing and justice in the future, but we are at least starting off on a more sound financial footing because we wanted to get it right rather than get it done quickly. We wanted to get it done so that we were on a sure-footing, rather than simply listening to the siren voices telling us to do it no matter what the consequences were. We are seeing the result of that work today.

I will turn to some of the points that were raised by various Members. The Chairman of the Committee for Finance and Personnel indicated the Committee's support, which, as far as I understand, was unanimous. I do not know whether some of the points that were raised by Members during the debate were raised at Committee level, but I welcome the fact that the Committee accepted the Main Estimates and the request for accelerated passage of the Budget Bill.

The Chairman also raised the issue of the George Cross museum. The figure relating to that is not included in the Main Estimates. That work is ongoing, and once it is completed, the Estimate cover will be taken at a later date. The Secretary of State included the transfer for the police museum in the figures that he presented to the Assembly and Executive Review Committee in February 2010.

Mr Shannon raised the issue of protecting front line services. It is important that we ensure that there are sufficient police officers on the streets. The job of protecting front line services is, of course, an operational decision for the Chief Constable, and I do not wish to tell him how to do his job, though he is committed to increasing the resources for front line services,

and he is bringing forward plans to the Policing Board as to how he intends to achieve that in the next year.

Mr McNarry spoke about the key issues that have not been resolved. Again, it is disappointing that Mr McNarry is not here, but even if there are key issues — and I will deal with them in a moment or two — we would have been in a far worse position on the issue had we listened to the Ulster Unionist Party, first during the debate on the funding of policing last autumn, and, secondly, in the debate that we had in the House a couple of weeks ago because, had we refused to accept the devolution of policing and justice, the financial package would not have been in place. Indeed, the Chief Constable said that the impact on his budget for next year would have amounted to around £68 million.

I dispute Mr McNarry's lament that key issues have not been dealt with. Far more key issues would not have been dealt with if we had gone down the road that the Ulster Unionist Party wanted to take us on 9 March.

Mr Bell: Is it not the case that had we not done what we have done and had we lost that money, we may have had to consider making several thousand police officers redundant?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: That was the point that I was making when I talked about the budget shortfall that the Chief Constable had drawn to our attention as a potential consequence of the devolution of policing and justice not going through.

Mr B McCrea: Will the Minister give way?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I will give way in a moment or two. Perhaps the Member will wish to come back to me after I have dealt with the point about the key issues.

Mr McNarry said that there are three key issues. The first of those is the question of how much money would have to be drawn down for the Attorney General's office. The Member was present for the start of the debate, and if he had listened, he would have heard me say that the money that is required for OFMDFM is not included in this. That money was voted for in the Budget, which we discussed ad nauseam in the House some weeks ago. The figure was included in the Budget. As far as I understand, as part of that Budget, his party voted for £1

million to be available for the Attorney General's office.

Mr Attwood asked whether that was really needed and why the paper from OFMDFM on the powers and location of the Attorney General had not been brought forward. That is not my responsibility. Questions to the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister are scheduled for later this afternoon, and I am sure that he will have the opportunity to put that to the First Minister and deputy First Minister. The Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister can hold OFMDFM to account, and questions can be asked in the House at Question Time. The Member is better to direct his questions to the Ministers who are responsible. I think that there should be transparency in all those issues, and there should be efficiency of spending on those issues. Once a budget is allocated to a Department, it is up to that Department to decide how to manage it.

Mr McNarry's second issue was that the cost of the North/South justice arrangements is unknown. I do not know where Mr McNarry got that point from. The devolution arrangements define the areas of North/South co-operation, for which there are North/South Ministerial Council meetings. I am not aware of any North/South arrangements that deal with the issue of policing and justice. Perhaps that is part of Mr McNarry's imagination. I do not know what he was referring to, and he has not had the courtesy to stay in the Chamber to come back to me on that. He asked how much the North/South arrangements will cost. They will not cost anything, because there is no North/South arrangement in that area. Perhaps a North/South arrangement is on his wish list, but there is none at present.

Mr Attwood: I certainly want to have a lot more North/South ministerial arrangements. The Minister happens to be in error on the matter, because there is a North/South justice arrangement between the British Government and the Irish Government that, on devolution, will become part of the responsibility of the Northern Ireland Executive and Dublin. Consequently, a whole lot of money is being spent on North/South justice arrangements, contrary to what the Minister indicated.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: Mr McNarry mentioned specifically North/South

ministerial arrangements. The Member knows very well that any such arrangements will probably involve one or two officials. No massive budget for that is coming down the road.

Mr McNarry's last point was on whether access to the reserve was copper fastened. Mention has been made of the fact that negotiations took place not only with the Prime Minister but with the Leader of the Opposition, who gave his assurance that he would stand by the arrangements that had been agreed with the Prime Minister. The claims on the reserve associated with legal aid are not repayable. That part is copper fastened, and the Prime Minister has made it clear that the other claims on the reserve in exceptional circumstances will not be repayable. We, therefore, have assurances on that issue.

I wish to address Mr O'Loan's points. Mr O'Loan is increasingly becoming the Jeremiah of the Assembly. By his own definition, he is pessimistic. I think that he said that twice, and I was listening closely to hear whether he said it a third time. Mr O'Loan is the Northern Ireland Assembly's prophet of doom. He said that he is pessimistic because we are simply inheriting spending plans that are not our own. However, that situation is not unusual. The next Government at Westminster will inherit the spending plans of the current Government, and they will live with those plans until such times as they can change them. When the Assembly was set up, it had to live with the spending plans that had been set by the previous direct rule Administration until such times as it was able to change them.

I made it clear in my speech that the budget for policing is an interim arrangement and that the Executive, the Assembly and the Justice Minister will have the opportunity to consider whether to change the spending plans. I pointed out that the Executive will have to decide quickly about whether to ring-fence the spending plans for 2010-11 in order to provide some certainty for the forthcoming year at least. That is a reasonable request. After that, the Assembly will, of course, want to have its fingerprints on the spending plans.

Mr Farry and Mr Attwood were among the Members who raised a question about ring-fencing the budget. Some Members said that they did not think that any Department's budget should be ring-fenced for ever, because that would

prevent it from considering different options. For example, are there other ways of delivering justice? Could the Department of Education or the Health Department help to keep people out of prison or deal with drug addicts who get into trouble and finish up prison, which costs us money? Those types of debates are possible only if budgets are not ring-fenced. Of course, ring-fencing any budget is likely to fossilise the way in which money is spent by a Department rather than to encourage people to look for efficiencies.

Mr O'Loan also made a point about the link with other budgets. He made his usual complaints about the CSI strategy and the parades issue, neither of which has anything to do with this debate. The parades legislation will go out for consultation shortly, and Mr O'Loan will have ample opportunity then to read it and respond to it. Given that the legislation must pass through the Assembly, he should not be so pessimistic about the future and about being closed out of the process.

I think that I have already dealt with Mr Farry's point about ring-fencing the budget. He pointed out that the budget must be used wisely. It will be up to the Executive to decide whether the policing budget should be ring-fenced for this year. I think that it was Mr O'Loan who asked whether money can be moved among the different heads of the Department through the in-year monitoring process. If the budget is ring-fenced, any reduced requirements will be available within the budget for that year. If the Executive decide to ring-fence the budget, I think that it will be possible to move money within the Department for that year at least, unless there is a dramatic change in how that money is spent. For example, the Department's decision to stop doing something could have an impact on its budget.

2.00 pm

Mr Weir made a point about pensions and the fact that, without the more flexible arrangements that we have now, there would be a potential deficit in pensions of £100 million because of the way in which actuaries make decisions on a year-to-year basis. As that would be part of the departmental expenditure limit, that would have meant an immediate hit, rather than taking the longer-term view of changes in the computation of the budget. That would have been one impact. The addition of £20 million to the legal aid budget

has been guaranteed until 2012, after which that figure will go down to an extra £14 million. Mr Weir also asked how we can be sure about the national reserve, but I have already dealt with that.

Mr Basil McCrea indicated that he had reservations about a number of issues, including the funding of hearing loss claims, which has a potential liability of up to £400 million. The package provides that the Department of Justice will address the first £12 million a year of hearing loss claims. However, it can also draw on reserves for any claims above £12 million. In addition, money from the sale of capital assets will be available for the Department of Justice to pay out even its first £12 million.

I know what Mr McCrea's next question will be. He will try to intervene to ask what will happen if those capital assets cannot be sold. I see that he is poised to jump up and ask the question. However, even in that case, arrangements have been made whereby it will be possible to use the fact that we have assets to gain flexibility in funding if the £12 million cannot be realised in the necessary year because of the way that asset values are going. Therefore, the Executive will have cover. I hope that I am giving the Member some assurances around hearing loss claims. It is an area in which there was the potential for a huge demand on the Executive, but it has been dealt with. However, I see that he still wants to intervene.

Mr B McCrea: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way. I had the benefit of meeting the Minister's party leader and the deputy First Minister when the arrangements around hearing loss claims, which even he would agree are rather complicated, were explained. Therefore, I know the various caveats that are involved. However, my next question seeks to put the issue to bed. I may have misheard the Minister, so perhaps he can provide clarity. In an earlier exchange, he seemed to indicate that, if we had not got this package and had, instead, to bear the full brunt of hearing loss claims from existing resources, the £400 million liability would have resulted in the redundancy of perhaps — as I think he said — several thousands of officers. Given the level of dissident threat, would the Minister seriously expect any Member of Her Majesty's Government, from the Conservative Party, the Labour Party, or any other party, to put that through? It is not a credible suggestion.

My final question to the Minister, again for clarity, is in response to something that was brought up by Mr Ford. My understanding is that the Chief Constable has already indicated that he is no longer tied to the Patten numbers of 7,500 officers and that he will reduce the number of officers to achieve more efficient expenditure. His argument is that that will get more officers on the streets, albeit with fewer officers in total. Is the Minister aware of the Chief Constable's proposition that we will have to reduce to enhance?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I do not think that it was I who said that there would be "several thousands" of redundancies in relation to hearing loss claims. That may have been said in an intervention by another Member. However, I did point out that the Chief Constable has indicated that, without the package, there would have been a hit on the budget of £68 million this year because of pensions and other changes.

As the Member will know from his involvement on the Policing Board, that would have some implications for the number of officers that could be employed, because employment and staff costs form the biggest part of the police budget.

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

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I will. The Member also asked whether any Government would allow such a running down of officer numbers. We are seeking to ensure that that will not happen.

Other points were made during the debate that I have not managed to respond to. However, I am not too concerned by that because I am sure that the same points will be made during the debate on the Second Stage of the Budget (No. 2) Bill. I will have the opportunity to respond to those points at that stage.

Mr Deputy 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 this Assembly approves that a sum, not exceeding £1,432,778,000, be granted out of the Consolidated Fund, for or towards defraying the

charges for the Department of Justice, the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister and the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland for the year ending 31 March 2011 and that resources, not exceeding £1,369, 871,000, be authorised for use by the Department of Justice, the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister and the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland for the year ending 31 March 2011 as summarised for each Department or other public body in columns 4(b) and 4(a) of table 1.3 in the volume of the Northern Ireland Estimates 2010-11 that was laid before the Assembly on 15 March 2010.

Executive Committee Business

Budget (No. 2) Bill: First Stage

The Minister of Finance and Personnel

(Mr S Wilson): I beg to introduce the Budget (No. 2) Bill [NIA 11/09], which is a Bill to authorise the issue out of the Consolidated Fund of certain sums for the service of the year ending 31st March 2011; to appropriate those sums for specified purposes; to authorise the use for the public service of certain resources for the year ending 31st March 2011.

Bill passed First Stage and ordered to be printed.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I wish to inform Members that written notification has been received from the Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel, confirming that the Committee is satisfied that, in accordance with Standing Order 42(2), there has been appropriate consultation with the Committee on the public expenditure proposals contained in the Budget (No. 2) Bill, and that it can, therefore, proceed under accelerated passage. The Second Stage of the Bill will be brought before the House later today.

The Pneumoconiosis, etc., (Workers' Compensation) (Payment of Claims) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010

The Minister for Social Development

(Ms Ritchie): I beg to move

That the Pneumoconiosis, etc., (Workers' Compensation) (Payment of Claims) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010 be affirmed.

The regulations are made under the Pneumoconiosis, etc., (Workers' Compensation) (Northern Ireland) Order 1979, and increase the compensation payable under the Order to people who satisfy the conditions of entitlement on or after 1 April 2010. The increase in the amounts payable under the Order maintains parity with the corresponding scheme that operates in Britain.

I will briefly explain the Order's purpose. An employer can be sued by someone who suffers from an industrial disease when that disease was contracted as a result of working for that employer. However, the diseases that are covered by the Order can take a long time to

develop and may not be diagnosed for 20, 40 or even more years after exposure to dust. By that time, the employer or employers that are responsible may no longer exist. Consequently, sufferers and their dependants can experience great difficulty in obtaining compensation.

The scheme was introduced in 1979 to help people who had no realistic chance of success in suing through the courts because their employers were no longer in business. It provides for a lump sum payment to sufferers. Payments are additional to any award of weekly industrial injuries disablement benefit for the same disease. A claim can also be made by dependants after a sufferer's death.

In order to receive a payment under the 1979 scheme, a person must have been awarded industrial injuries disablement benefit.

Two further conditions have to be met before any payment can be made. First, there must be no relevant employer who can be sued. Secondly, court action must not have been brought or compensation received in respect of any of the diseases in respect of which a person is claiming.

The scheme covers five respiratory diseases, most of which are directly related to asbestos exposure. Those diseases are diffuse mesothelioma, diffuse pleural thickening, primary carcinoma of the lung, byssinosis and pneumoconiosis, which includes asbestosis.

Some people who suffer from mesothelioma are not entitled to any payment under the 1979 scheme, because they were not exposed to asbestos in the workplace. However, since October 2008, the new mesothelioma scheme, which I introduced, provides for lump sum payments to sufferers of mesothelioma, regardless of whether they were employees, self-employed or had never worked, provided that they have not received compensation from another source.

The amount to be paid under the regulations is based on a simple calculation, which cross-references the age of a sufferer and the level of disability. Higher amounts are paid to people who have higher levels of disability and whose disability arises at an early age. From April 2010, the maximum amount that can be paid is just over £75,000 for a person aged 37 or under at the time of diagnosis. Lower amounts are payable to dependants who claim after the sufferer has passed on. The amounts payable

under the scheme have been increased by 1.5%, in line with this year's uprating of industrial injuries benefit.

In addition, to reduce the differential in the payments made to sufferers and those made to dependants, all amounts payable to dependants have been increased. That means that most dependants will receive an additional payment of up to £5,000, subject to the amount not exceeding what would have been paid to the sufferer had he or she received a payment before passing on. In those circumstances, the amount payable will be increased to at least equal the amount that would have been paid to the sufferer in life.

The regulations help to ensure that the compensation provided under the Order maintains its value and, in the case of dependants, significantly increases the amount payable. I am sure that Members across the Assembly will warmly welcome that and support the regulations.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development (Mr Hamilton): The Committee for Social Development considered the proposal to introduce the Pneumoconiosis, etc., (Workers' Compensation) (Payment of Claims) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010 at our meeting on 18 February 2009, and we considered the statutory rule on 4 March 2009. I will try to limit the number of times I say "pneumoconiosis" in the debate.

As the Minister said, the regulations will increase the amounts that are payable to the sufferers of certain dust-related diseases — or their dependants — who have been unable to claim damages from the relevant employer because that employer is no longer in business. Dust-related diseases can take a long time to develop and may not be diagnosed until a considerable number of years after exposure. Therefore, a scenario in which an employer that is responsible for the dust exposure is no longer in business by the time that claims arise can be quite common.

Although no amount of money could compensate for the misery and suffering that is caused by diseases such as pneumoconiosis, the amounts that are payable will offer some assistance to sufferers and their dependants. It is important that the compensation increases and that those amounts keep pace with inflation. In conclusion,

the Committee recommends that the regulations be affirmed by the Assembly.

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

Mrs M Bradley: I welcome the regulations and I thank the Minister for bringing them to the House.

The Minister for Social Development: I am pleased with the consensus of support, spoken and non-spoken, across the Assembly for the regulations. I thank the Chairperson of the Social Development Committee and its members for the positive way in which they dealt with the regulations, both in its meeting on 12 March 2009, when they gave the regulations assent, and in the Chamber today. In my initial speech, I trust that I dealt with all the issues that Members may have.

If I have inadvertently failed to do so, I will write to the Chairperson and to Mrs Bradley.

2.15 pm

I am certain that we all want to ensure that the value of compensation under the 1979 Order is not eroded by inflation. The regulations will ensure that that does not happen. In addition, I am particularly pleased to be able to introduce significantly increased compensation for dependants. I commend the motion to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Pneumoconiosis, etc., (Workers' Compensation) (Payment of Claims) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010 be affirmed.

Mr Speaker: I suggest that the House take its ease until we move to the next item of business.

Assembly Business

Suspension of Standing Orders

The Minister of Finance and Personnel

(Mr S Wilson): I beg to move

That Standing Orders 31(d), 37, 39(1) and 42(5) be suspended in respect of the passage of the Budget (No.2) Bill.

I apologise for my absence from the House. When I left, the Minister for Social Development was struggling through words that I do not know how to spell, let alone say. I thought that I had plenty of time to make a phone call. The Members on the speaking list must have decided not to speak for too long.

I have brought the motion to the House today to ensure that the Assembly can consider all the stages of the Budget (No.2) Bill before the Easter recess. That will allow the Bill to be enacted before powers are devolved to the future Department of Justice on Monday 12 April. As Members will be aware, accelerated passage is the normal procedure for Budget Bills because they require Royal Assent within a very short timescale. Indeed, as is normal with Budget Bills, the Chairperson of the Finance and Personnel Committee has written to the Speaker to signal the Committee's agreement to the Bill's accelerated passage. However, on this occasion, I am seeking the Assembly's approval of my proposal for additional acceleration. For that to happen, I ask Members to support the motion on the suspension of Standing Orders 31(d), 37, 39(1) and 42(5) in respect of the passage of the Budget (No.2) Bill.

The suspension of those Standing Orders removes the need for the Further Consideration Stage and the minimum 10-day time period for the passage of a Bill through the Assembly. This will mean that the Bill can pass through the Assembly in two days – today and tomorrow. Those exceptional arrangements are unavoidable because, until the Assembly resolution was passed on 9 March, we could not be sure that those powers would be devolved. However, Members will have the normal opportunities to scrutinise the Bill during its Second Stage, Consideration Stage and Final Stage, albeit in a more restrictive timetable. Although the Further Consideration Stage will be omitted, that stage has been a formality for previous Budget Bills.

It is essential that the Bill passes its Final Stage tomorrow as that is the final scheduled date for Assembly plenary business before the Easter recess. Moreover, its passage will ensure that the new Department of Justice, the Public Prosecution Service and additional functions in the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister have statutory cover for the use of resources and cash in discharging those new responsibilities for the year ending 31 March 2011.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

That Standing Orders 31(d), 37, 39(1) and 42(5) be suspended in respect of the passage of the Budget (No.2) Bill.

Executive Committee Business

Budget (No. 2) Bill: Second Stage

The Minister of Finance and Personnel

(Mr S Wilson): I beg to move

That the Second Stage of the Budget (No. 2) Bill [NIA 11/09] be agreed.

This debate follows the Bill's First Stage, which took place earlier today, and the Supply resolution, which was subsequently debated at length and approved. The Budget (No. 2) Bill provides the authority to use cash and resources to enable the delivery of services relating to policing and justice in 2010-11, as currently planned, after the devolution of those new responsibilities on 12 April 2010.

The Assembly is well rehearsed on the logistical reasons for accelerated passage of the Budget (No. 2) Bill. On this occasion, I also sought a suspension of Standing Orders relating to the Bill's Further Consideration Stage and the 10-day rule. As I explained earlier, those are required to ensure that the Bill receives Royal Assent by 12 April. The Committee for Finance and Personnel and the OFMDFM Committee played an important role in ensuring the Bill's accelerated passage. I am grateful that the Committee for Finance and Personnel confirmed that, in line with Standing Order 42, it is satisfied that there has been appropriate consultation with it on the public expenditure proposals in the Bill. Once again, I welcome and appreciate the Committee's assistance in ensuring adherence to the legislative timetable for the Bill. The Committee was assisted by the OFMDFM Committee in its scrutiny of that Department's Estimates, which underpin the Bill.

For the benefit of Members, and in accordance with the nature of Second Stage debates as envisaged under Standing Order 32, I shall briefly draw attention to a few key points and the general principles of the Bill. Although this is the first Budget Bill to include policing and justice matters, the format and layout of the Budget (No. 2) Bill and the Estimates will be familiar to Members from the passage of other Budget Bills through the Assembly.

The principle of the Bill is to authorise the issue of £1,432,778,000 from the Northern Ireland Consolidated Fund and the use of resources totalling £1,369,871,000 for the Department of Justice, the Public Prosecution Service and

additional expenditure by OFMDFM. The sums to be issued from the Consolidated Fund are to be apportioned by each Department or public body for services as detailed in column 1 of schedule 1 to the Bill, and the resources are to be used for the purposes specified in column 1 of schedule 2 to the Bill. I ask Members to bear in mind that those sums are inherited financial allocations for 2010-11, which were set by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Court Service prior to the devolution of policing and justice matters.

As I said earlier, the Assembly's adoption of those plans represents a sensible way of ensuring the continuation of valuable policing and justice services. In addition, the Bill sets out for 2010-11 the limit on the amount of accruing resources that may be directed by my Department to be used for the purposes as set out in column 1 of schedule 2. That limit includes both operating and non-operating accruing resources. Under section 8 of the Government Resources and Accounts Act (Northern Ireland) 2001, a direction on the actual use of the accruing resources will be provided by way of a DFP minute, which will be laid before the Assembly after the Bill has received Royal Assent.

I remind Members to bear in mind the relevance of the Budget (No. 2) Bill on the path to ensuring the full devolution of policing and justice powers by 12 April 2010. The Bill reflects the cash and resources that are required to facilitate the detailed spending plans of the Department of Justice, the Public Prosecution Service and other additional expenditure by OFMDFM, which will be incurred as a consequence of devolution of policing and justice for the financial year ending 31 March 2011. The detailed spending plans are set out in the 2010-11 Main Estimates.

The spending plans that are reflected in the Budget (No. 2) Bill were debated and approved by the House earlier. Therefore, I do not propose to spend any more time on the detail of the Bill. Question Time is coming up, and you are getting nervous, Mr Speaker. However, I am happy to take questions afterwards. I commend the Budget (No. 2) Bill to the Assembly.

Mr Speaker: I suggest that the House takes its ease until Question Time.

The debate stood suspended.

2.30 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Parades Working Group

1. **Mr Kennedy** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the recommendations of the parades working group and the responses to date of the parading organisations to the proposals. (AQO 974/10)

The First Minister (Mr P Robinson): As part of the agreement that was reached at Hillsborough Castle on 5 February 2010, the deputy First Minister and I established a working group and appointed six members who had experience of dealing with parading issues. The working group has been involved in a period of intensive work to fulfil its task. That has included a series of meetings with elected representatives and a range of stakeholders including representatives of residents' groups.

The working group has presented its report to the deputy First Minister and me, and work progresses to prepare a draft Bill that will implement the working group's agreed outcomes. In line with the timetable that was set out in the Hillsborough agreement, we are committed to the completion of a draft Bill by late March or early April, at which point full consultation will be undertaken. Pending that full consultation on the draft Bill, we consider that it would be inappropriate to provide details of the responses from stakeholders' submissions and premature to outline the recommendations of the parades working group.

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the First Minister for his reply. When does he expect the recommendations of the parades working group to be tabled at the Executive to enable a more inclusive, all-party approach to this important issue? Will the First Minister also confirm whether the Loyal Orders will be consulted on an ongoing basis as the proposals emerge?

The First Minister: We discussed the parades working group at the last meeting of the Executive. Indeed, we reported on all the working groups

that were set up as a result of the Hillsborough agreement.

The working group has not completed its work, but it provided a framework that is being put into the form of a draft Bill. The draftsmen have already been coming back with detailed elements and technical issues. As soon as that is completed, the draft Bill will go to the Executive, after which it will go out for public consultation. The public consultation will probably last about 12 weeks. As the Member will know, we intend to provide the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister with the detail of the responses to that consultation. The Committee will carry out its own hearings or inquiry as best suits.

As far as the Loyal Orders are concerned, we have received useful assistance and advice from Rev Mervyn Gibson. As the Member will be aware, Rev Mervyn Gibson was a member of the Ashdown strategic review body. His input has been very helpful. Indeed, I would go as far as to say that we could not have done without it. He and my colleagues have spoken to the institution about the broad framework and will continue to provide updates as and when required.

Mrs D Kelly: Does the First Minister accept that the fact that many members of the Loyal Orders have been briefed about the working group on a number of occasions does not instil confidence among the wider community and, in particular, residents' groups? Furthermore, the fact that two political parties have been excluded —

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

Mrs D Kelly: My question relates to the fact that two political parties have been excluded and the Loyal Orders have been briefed but the wider community and nationalist groups, in particular, have not.

The First Minister: My understanding is that residents' groups met the working group and that political parties were also present. If people want to speak to elected representatives about the relevant issues, they can do so. This will probably be the most consulted-on legislation that this Assembly or its predecessors have ever produced. As I said, there will be a 12-week consultation period on the draft Bill. Furthermore, when the deputy First Minister and I seek the transfer of that legislation to the

Assembly, it will face the scrutiny that comes under the auspices of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister and the various stages of debate in the Assembly. Therefore, everyone will have plenty of opportunity to talk about the legislation in detail.

Mr McKay: I commend the efforts that the working group has made to date, especially those that involved taking evidence from residents' groups, such as those from the Garvaghy Road, the Ormeau Road and other parts of the North.

The First Minister has already answered my question on the next steps that are to be taken in this process. What progress is being made on the absence of dialogue, which is a key issue for a number of residents' groups, including that at Rasharkin? Has any progress been made on this year's marching season?

The First Minister: There is an obligation on the deputy First Minister and me to proceed with the other aspect of the parades issue, which is recognising that a number of parades have been intrinsically difficult and cannot be dealt with simply by having a meeting a few weeks prior to the date when the parade is due. Therefore, we looked at getting in place the kind of dialogue that the Member is talking about.

From my experience last year in attempting to get dialogue going on the Garvaghy Road, I know that that is not always easy to accomplish. However, I am pretty sure that it is on my agenda and that of the deputy First Minister to try to get things moving on all those parades that we recognise as being legacy parades with difficulties attached to them.

Mr Shannon: I thank the First Minister for his responses to questions this afternoon.

Parading is a very big issue. The level of interest shown by everyone in the Chamber is clear from the questions that are being asked. What would happen if parading was not concluded through the Hillsborough Castle Agreement? If no agreement were reached, where would we be?

The First Minister: The Hillsborough Castle Agreement has given us the opportunity to tackle an issue that has caused massive problems. There has been both community division and a financial cost as a consequence of those problems. If some believe that we can just continue with the Parades Commission, they would be taking the option of doing nothing.

In my view, the Parades Commission has become part of the problem and needs to be replaced. We need what a Member who spoke previously referred to as a dialogue-centred process. Such a process would be fairer, more transparent and would clearly provide a better form of adjudication than exists for those of us who have been frustrated with the Parades Commission. More of the same awaits us if we do not resolve this issue. Ours is a divided society, and this is one of the issues that lies at the heart of that division. If we want to heal our society and to have a shared society, we must tackle such issues and not run away from them.

Presbyterian Mutual Society

2. **Mr Storey** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the efforts being made to help savers within the Presbyterian Mutual Society. (AQO 975/10)

The First Minister: The frequency with which we are asked for updates about the situation of the Presbyterian Mutual Society (PMS) illustrates the concern that Members right across the Assembly feel for the fate of PMS savers.

The deputy First Minister and I share that concern. We are acutely aware that the impact of prevailing circumstances has led to difficulty and hardship for a significant number of local people. We have said in the past that remedies to the PMS situation are complex, but I readily acknowledge that that is cold comfort to those who are dealing with daily anxiety about their savings.

Although this is a matter for Westminster in the first instance, Members of the Assembly will know that officials have been looking at a number of options for dealing with the crisis. A final report is to be presented shortly to the ministerial working group that was set up to examine options for helping PMS members. Thereafter, we hope to be in a position to share details.

Mr Storey: I thank the First Minister for his reply. This is an issue that causes, and has caused, grave concern to a large number of people. Unfortunately, we have gone through a number of moderators since this issue has been brought to the fore, but there is still no conclusion. Will the First Minister tell us if and when the various options for the PMS will be published?

The First Minister: I am sure that the deputy First Minister and I have forgotten how many times we have spoken to the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State about this issue. Along with the Minister of Finance and Personnel and the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, we have attended joint ministerial meetings to examine the various options that are open to us.

We all agree that by far the best option would be for a bank to show an interest and to take over the responsibilities. In the absence of that, we are considering an option that is being worked up by our officials, under our direction. I hope that the Treasury would be prepared to accept that option, which meets its criteria. The Executive would decide whether they wish to move forward with that option. However, that option would come second to the commercial or banking option, which has not been ruled out.

Ms Anderson: Go raibh maith agat. Does the First Minister believe that in light of the Financial Services Authority's conclusion that the Presbyterian Mutual Society was conducting regulated activities without authorisation or exemption, it is time for the PMS directors to apologise publicly to those who had savings in that organisation?

The First Minister: I will be very careful about that matter. If there are legal issues, a decision will have to be taken at some stage about whether any action should be taken. I am sure that the Member will agree with me that the people who invested money are blameless. All Members have a responsibility, in so far as it lies with us, to take whatever steps we can to ensure that the savings that PMS members deposited are recovered.

The PMS grew exponentially and at such a pace that regulation was bypassed because of the difference between registration and regulation. The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment was responsible for registration but not for regulation. The regulation should have come from elsewhere. Given that gap, Her Majesty's Government have a responsibility, which is why we have been pressing the Government to assist us to deal with the savers.

Rev Dr Robert Coulter: I thank the First Minister for his concern about the suffering of many of the savers. Older people seem to be suffering more than others. Are there any plans to help them in their present need?

The First Minister: The Member will be aware that the administrator received a judgement from the courts that indicated how any funds that are available to him will have to be shared out. Unfortunately, many of the people to whom the Member refers fall into the category of those with savings of less than £20,000. Under PMS rules, they are the last to receive a payment.

The deputy First Minister and I are concerned about that and are considering ways to ensure that we deal with those who are in severe hardship. Those are not just elderly people, although they constitute a large element. There are disabled people in my constituency whose funds for care are in the PMS, and they cannot access them. They are relying on the generosity of family members, which puts considerable strain on those family members. There is much hardship and anxiety, which means that we must find a solution to this affair very quickly. People cannot hang on for much longer.

OFMDFM: Staffing

3. **Mr McCartney** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the proposed reorganisation of staff in their Department. (AQO 976/10)

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Ceist uimhir a trí. Question 3.

The First Minister: In the Budget for 2008-2011, the Executive agreed that Departments would deliver 5% per annum administrative efficiency savings over 2008-09 to 2010-11. The Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) is required to deliver £2 million in efficiency savings across the three years. Those measures will result in a reduction of approximately 51 full-time equivalent posts. The objective is to have that completed, as far as possible, by 1 April 2010 through redeployment in the Northern Ireland Civil Service and the suppression of vacancies.

To date, we have been able to implement around half of the required reductions, and we are hopeful that the remainder will be achieved within the required time frame. The Department is engaging with trade union side to take the work forward.

2.45 pm

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a fhreagra.

Will the First Minister assure the Assembly that there will be no reduction in services for children and young people, victims and survivors and older people as a result of the proposed reorganisation?

The First Minister: I understand that there are concerns, particularly among groups with an interest in children and young people, that removing the various units, or silos, in the policy directorate will mean that the concentration and focus on those interests will be reduced. I would suggest that the opposite is probably true. By removing silos, we can ensure that staff time is concentrated on working where it is needed. I do not envisage any reduction in services as a result of the changes that we are making. Some units dealt exclusively with one group, and when their workload was completed or low, they sat there until more work came along. Under the new arrangements, everybody will be working at full tilt on the issues that are before them, so I do not envisage any reduction in services. As the process goes on, the deputy First Minister and I will continue to monitor it.

Mr O'Loan: As part of the reorganisation in his Department, the victims' unit is to be abolished. Does he accept that that has created anxiety in the minds of victims and survivors, particularly in light of the absence of a decision on a proposed victims' service? Indeed, should he not reinstate the victims' unit?

The First Minister: I shall be very clear about the matter. There is an assumption that we have done away with the gender and sexual orientation unit, the victims' unit, the children and young people's unit and the disability unit. What we have done is remove the silos to ensure that units do not work individually. Instead, the policy directorate as a whole will deal with all the work under its ambit. Consequently, under the system as it now exists, there will be no reduction in the importance and priority that is given to victims, and they can be certain that if work is required to be done, it will be done within the Department and without any lessening of output.

Mr G Robinson: How do OFMDFM staffing levels compare with those during the previous period of devolution?

The First Minister: I am sure that I have an answer somewhere, but, off the top of my head, I recollect that we started with about 420 members of staff and when the process is completed, we will be down to about 350 members of staff. Those are the rough statistics. We are reducing staffing levels by redeploying people within the Civil Service and by not filling vacancies, so it will be done as painlessly as possible.

There was an occasion when some colleagues in the Chamber indicated that the number of staff in OFMDFM is comparable to that in the White House. Statistically, they got even that wrong. Only a handful of staff deals with First Minister and deputy First Minister private office business. The difference with our office is that ours is a Department with departmental responsibilities and not just a private office for two Ministers.

Special Educational Needs

4. **Dr W McCrea** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what progress has been made by the ministerial subcommittee on children and young people to enhance provision for children with special educational needs in special schools, including provision for the transition to adulthood. (AQO 977/10)

The First Minister: With your permission, Mr Speaker, I shall ask junior Minister Robin Newton to answer that question.

The junior Minister (Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister) (Mr Newton): I thank the Member for South Antrim for his question, which is an important one. In general, he will be aware that the ministerial subcommittee on children and young people agreed six key priorities, one of which was provision for children with special educational needs in mainstream and special schools, including the transition to adulthood and the provision of appropriate health and social care interventions.

Cross-departmental subgroups have been established to take those priorities forward, and the subgroup that is progressing the work on special educational needs is led by the Department of Education. Each subgroup has developed action plans, which, with the exception of the child poverty action plan, have been agreed by the ministerial subcommittee. However, as the action plans have not been

formally agreed by the Executive, it would not be appropriate to share the content of the special educational needs plan. I can confirm that that subgroup has agreed that it will not cover work being taken forward by other groups. In order to make a real difference, it will, instead, focus on a single issue.

Therefore, work to date and planned work will focus on the area of transitions. Each of the Departments has received a copy of the action plan. As of this morning, two responses were outstanding; this afternoon, there is only one, which shows that the Departments are taking the matter seriously. Those action plans were provided only in February. We hope to seek formal Executive agreement to the plans very soon, possibly even this week. I will be able to provide more detailed information after the Executive meeting.

Dr W McCrea: Although I welcome the junior Minister's answer, how can he seek to encourage greater co-operation between the Departments that share responsibility in providing for the future of young people with special needs?

The junior Minister (Mr Newton): That is an important question that does not just relate to the subject raised by Mr McCrea. It falls into the area of concern that others have about our unique system of government that is based on, and developed for, addressing our political problems. Indeed, because of our political problems, we have a complex system and considerable effort has been put into trying to get Departments to work more closely together on issues such as this. We set up the ministerial subcommittees precisely for that reason.

Those subcommittees bring together the key Ministers with a team of officials to work on identified priority actions. Many important issues do not lie firmly within the boundaries of just one Department, so it is critical that we find ways in which to work effectively, and across boundaries, to identify solutions and to ensure that the subcommittees produce joined-up action plans.

Mr McCarthy: What assurances can the junior Minister give to the ICAN Centre based in Ballynahinch Primary School? The centre is concerned that lack of funding and support may curtail its excellent work.

The junior Minister (Mr Newton): I thank the Member for his question. I am not extremely familiar with that case. However, I will have some research done and happily come back to the Member on the matter.

Mr Kinahan: I thank the junior Minister for his answer, which touched slightly on my question. Will he confirm whether the ministerial subcommittee on children and young people has considered the Minister of Education's proposals on special educational needs provision, and the potential impact that that will have on the provision in special schools and mainstream education?

The junior Minister (Mr Newton): I thank the Member for his question. The 'Report of the Promoting Social Inclusion Working Group on Disability', presented to the First Minister and the deputy First Minister in December 2009, made several recommendations about the educational needs of children and young people with disabilities. The report is published on the OFMDFM website. Its recommendations include:

"Children and young people with disabilities should be offered the same opportunities as other young people in respect of education and training"

and:

"The inter-departmental task group should conduct an audit of services to disabled young people aged 14-25 years, identifying the gaps between services".

The review of the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986 and the associated guidance will establish a clear responsibility for the early assessment of the needs of disabled young persons who leave education. A strategic plan on transitions will be developed that will clearly set out a comprehensive person-centred transitions process for all young people with disabilities.

An Executive response to the working group's report is being developed. It will set out how the Executive intend to take forward the recommendations of the report. The Executive intend to consult fully on the proposals. The educational needs of children and young people with disabilities will also be considered in work to implement and monitor the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

US Investment

5. **Mr Moutray** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what investment opportunities were identified on their recent trip to Chicago and Washington. (AQO 978/10)

6. **Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on new emerging investment opportunities from the USA. (AQO 979/10)

10. **Mr Bresland** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an assessment of their recent visit to the USA. (AQO 983/10)

The First Minister: With your permission, Mr Speaker, I will take questions 5, 6 and 10 together.

Last week's visit to the US was, without doubt, the most successful visit that the deputy First Minister and I have made since we took office. The week-long programme was aimed specifically at promoting the Northern Ireland economy in all of its forms. I am pleased to inform the Assembly that we used our time to promote not only inward investment opportunities but trade development and tourism.

We began our itinerary in Chicago, where we met existing investors and the chief executive officers of several leading US companies that are potential investors. We also addressed an audience of some 200 leading business figures in Chicago and outlined the benefits of establishing a business in Northern Ireland. We were pleased to receive Mayor Richard Daley's personal endorsement of the work that we are doing to strengthen the local economy. Mayor Daley welcomed us to City Hall, where we had the opportunity to learn about the work that he commissioned to improve services to voters and how he introduced measures to address falling city government revenues.

In Washington DC, we continued to promote our economic development objective at a Northern Ireland business round table, which was organised on our behalf by the United States Economic Envoy, Declan Kelly. That event included members of some of Northern Ireland's most successful companies, who were in Washington as part of a strategic trade mission that was organised by Invest Northern Ireland.

Later, we had a private meeting with the Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, which we used to discuss opportunities for securing further support from the Obama Administration

for economic development initiatives here. Also in Washington, we joined Executive colleagues Arlene Foster, Sir Reg Empey and Margaret Ritchie at the Northern Ireland Bureau breakfast, where we presented, I hope, a united front to an audience of some 350 politicians, senior officials in the Obama Administration and members of the local business community. Minister Foster presented a very compelling multi-screen video of the five signature projects and encouraged all those in attendance to visit and to experience our world-class tourist product.

The highlight of our visit to Washington was our meeting with President Obama at the White House. We were delighted that despite the enormous pressure on the President with regard to the healthcare Bill, which at that stage was going through Congress, he gave us 30 minutes of his time to talk about Northern Ireland. The President was joined at the meeting by the Vice President, Joe Biden, the Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, and General Jones, the director of the National Security Council. That level of engagement by the four top office bearers in the United States Administration was unprecedented. It was a clear indication to the American people of the importance that the US Government place on supporting economic growth and political stability here.

Most significantly, in Washington, the deputy First Minister and I were able to engage directly with the Secretary of State, President Obama and several Members of Congress to seek their support for an economic conference in Washington in the autumn of this year. Although that event is at the very early stages of development, I can confirm that it will be a focused event that will be targeted at a limited number of very senior executives who will be specially selected with the help of Declan Kelly and Invest Northern Ireland. The event will be hosted by Secretary of State Clinton and supported by President Obama. In addition, we managed to secure the support of President Obama, Secretary of State Clinton and Members of Congress for the continuation of the International Fund for Ireland.

In New York, the deputy First Minister met the New York City Comptroller, the New York State Comptroller and several leading figures in the Irish-American business community. I went to Houston, Texas, accompanied by Minister Foster and the Invest NI chief executive officer, to meet

the executive management of Baker Hughes to discuss its decision to close its Belfast plant and to explore how the Executive could support the retention of work in Northern Ireland.

Last week provided the deputy First Minister and me with unparalleled access to some of the most senior decision-makers in corporate America. We met current and prospective investors, as well as a range of senior business and political leaders who can influence investment decisions here. I record our appreciation to Declan Kelly, whose contribution to our itinerary was vital.

3.00 pm

Employment and Learning

Skills Conference 2010

1. **Mr Bresland** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what he expects to achieve from the forthcoming Northern Ireland skills conference. (AQO 960/10)

The Minister for Employment and Learning (Sir Reg Empey):

The Department's annual skills conference is now in its fifth year. It brings together leading policymakers, educationalists, training providers, employers, industry representatives and business leaders. It encourages debate on key issues, linking skills development with enhanced productivity and competitiveness of the Northern Ireland economy. Each year, the conference focuses on a key aspect of the Department's skills agenda. Research by Oxford Economics and McKinsey indicates that managerial practices and the structure of the Northern Ireland economy need to be strengthened.

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

Mr Bresland: I thank the Minister for his answer. When talking to those involved in various aspects of the growing tourism industry, I get the impression that they have difficulty in finding people who have the right skills. Will the Minister indicate the extent to which the conference and the broader work of his Department will address that shortage?

The Minister for Employment and Learning: I assure the Member that a group is working on hospitality in general because we recognise that tourism will be a major growth industry

in the coming years. To that effect, we have been working with the sector on a number of issues. For instance, we are encouraging young people to come forward to be the chefs of the future, and a lot of young people have enrolled in a junior chefs' academy. They are very enthusiastic, and places on the courses are heavily oversubscribed. In addition to improving the infrastructure for tourism, we have to provide the service and the capability to deliver the services in that new infrastructure. Therefore, we are extremely keen to develop that sector and we are getting good support. I assure the Member that the tourism and hospitality sectors, which we conclude are one, are receiving very high levels of attention.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Minister for that answer. What are his views on the recent independent review of economic policy, which suggested that skills are a key driver for regional economic growth? How does he foresee those being developed?

The Minister for Employment and Learning: Oxford Economics has done work on our behalf and has produced some significant evidence. For instance, it is clear that management capability is one of the biggest drivers. If that can be improved, there will be a disproportionate improvement in productivity and earnings.

The Department is promoting and raising awareness of management and leadership proposals. For instance, we are running the Made Not Born campaign, which makes it clear that managers are made and not born. We also provide courses at 100% funding. We have had a big take-up of those and have managed to keep them fully funded throughout the year. Through that activity, the improved management of the future will be found. Oxford Economics has pointed out that management and leadership skills will have a disproportionate impact on the growth of the Northern Ireland economy. We believe that the reports from Oxford Economics and McKinsey show that by improving poor management practices, particularly in manufacturing sector, we could improve output by more than £300 million per annum.

Mr McDevitt: In view of the large number of people in the region who are qualified to NVQ level 2, is the Minister happy that those who are re-entering the New Deal and Steps to Work programmes are being encouraged to go for

higher NVQ qualifications, or does he believe that the trend is to continue to opt for the easier NVQ level 2 qualification?

The Minister for Employment and Learning: I do not accept the honourable Member's point. The drive is to raise skills, not merely keep them flat. That is the problem in this country. As the Member knows, far too many young people who do not have basic qualifications are being turned out of schools. A staggering 80% of young people are not getting up to five GCSEs, including maths and English. Therefore, the problem starts at a much earlier stage in our schooling system. It has always been a matter of absolute amazement to me that thousands of young children, who cannot read or write at the age of 10 or 11, are being transferred to secondary schools. I do not understand how we can get off the ground and improve our skills position as long as that remains the case.

I assure the Member that far from wishing to restrict skill levels, our objective is to increase them. That includes people in work and not simply those who are entering the workforce; it is a continuum. Considering the way in which the economies of the world are developing, the Member will know well that today's skills will not necessarily be adequate to keep people going in 10 years' time. Given that 70% of the people in today's workforce will be in the workforce in 2020, the majority of skills improvement will have to happen to those who are in work.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Will the forthcoming skills conference have any messages for those who lost their jobs in the construction and engineering industries recently? Will it help them to identify new career opportunities or new pathways? My question is based on the fact that those industries are in decline, not least in County Tyrone, where, in the recent past, there have been serious job losses.

The Minister for Employment and Learning: I am conscious that the Member is not alone in this House in having many constituents in the construction sector who are suffering. It is a problem across the Province. I am sad to say that one could count on the fingers of one hand the number of construction jobs advertised in our job centres. There is no evidence of an upturn in the construction sector at this stage. In fact, the situation is quite the reverse. However, through our programme-led apprenticeships, we are still providing places for

the construction sector. The fact that the sector has been suffering in the past couple years is no reason not to upskill the people in it. In fact, it is one reason to do precisely the opposite, if possible. The higher the level of skills available in a company, the more efficient it will become and, therefore, the more likely that it will be to achieve work through tendering.

Although construction is a depressing panorama at this stage, we have to rely on that sector to rebuild the Province's infrastructure over a prolonged period. The investment strategy for Northern Ireland contains a long list of infrastructure projects that we want to deliver. We will not give up on the requirement to ensure that there are highly skilled people in the construction sector in this country.

Stranmillis University College

2. Mr Storey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what steps he is taking to have the chair and governors of Stranmillis College reconstituted. (AQO 961/10)

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

The college's governing body is constituted in accordance with paragraph 2 of schedule 2 to the Colleges of Education (Northern Ireland) Order 2005 and the college's instrument of government. The term of office of a number of the current governing body members is due to expire in July of this year. However, all but one of the members have agreed to stand for a second term, as permitted in the regulations. In line with the legislation, the college is also considering the co-option of a further two members to the governing body.

Mr Storey: Does the Minister agree that a problem exists with regard to a deficit on the board of governors of Stranmillis University College, given the fact it no longer includes transferor representatives? Will he assure the House that with regard to the co-option of members onto the board when it is reconstituted, the college's Christian ethos will be protected? There are grave concerns that in moving forward with any merger plan, the Christian ethos that has been very much to the fore and much appreciated for many years at Stranmillis College will be diluted. Can he assure the House that that ethos will not be left behind, as opposed to the way in which other colleges are promoted?

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

The Member will understand that when the architecture of the governing body of Stranmillis College changed — in 2006, I believe — it was changed against the will of his party and mine.

As I indicated, I must operate under the Colleges of Education (Northern Ireland) Order 2005. I anticipate that, after July 2010, there will be 13 members on the board, seven of whom will be nominated by the Department and six of whom will be nominated by the college. I understand that the college's nominees would include two co-opted members, the appointment of whom it is considering. The issue is that, under legislation, at least half of the members must be nominated by the Department. That will be the case. However, the issue to which the Member refers has particular pertinence in view of the proposed merger. I have indicated to the House on a number of occasions that I am addressing that issue at present. I hope that that particular matter will be addressed directly during consultation on any proposals that I make.

At the end of the day, as the Member will be aware, the House will have the final say in all those matters. A number of Members have made representations to me on that very issue. As he pointed out, the automatic right of transferor representatives to seats on the board was removed by that Order, which, I suspect, both he and I opposed. I am dealing with the legislative framework for the appointment of the board. I am unable to operate outside that. However, as regards any merger proposals, we are perfectly entitled to consider proposals at that stage that would deal with the matter to which the Member refers.

Rev Dr Robert Coulter: In view of the many difficulties that seem to have arisen, is there any apparent resolution of the problem of the merger at present?

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

The business case took far longer to resolve than I had anticipated. It has, however, been with my Department and has gone back to the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP), which, I believe, has approved it. Now, I want to bring proposals for a public consultation to the Executive. At that stage, the issues to which the Member referred will be addressed. I hope that it will not be too long coming.

Mr Butler: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Does the Minister agree that the

longer that the proposed merger of Stranmillis College and Queen's University takes, the more uncertainty that creates? Mervyn Storey's question reflected the uncertainty that prevails in Stranmillis College. The Minister must provide the Assembly with some certainty as to what the future holds for Queen's University and Stranmillis College with regard to a merger. The longer that that issue continues, the more uncertainty it creates, not only for the board of governors but for employees at Queen's and Stranmillis. Can the Minister provide assurance that the issue will be fast-tracked as soon as possible?

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

I cannot disagree with the Member. However, as I said, the business case required so much work that its completion took much longer than expected. That was not the Department's fault. The business case was prepared by the college together with Queen's University; it was not prepared by the Department.

Our job is to respond to the business case. After the Department sent responses backwards and forwards to the college and the consultants who prepared the case, which required a great deal of work, the case went to DFP. The Department is now preparing a consultation document, which must go to the Executive before it can be published. I assure the Member that I am conscious of the point that he makes and that the Department will do everything as quickly as possible. However, I gave an assurance to the House that it was not my intention to try to railroad any legislation through. It will take its course. I have repeated that undertaking on a number of occasions.

3.15 pm

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question 3 has been withdrawn.

DEL: Bonuses

4. **Mr W Clarke** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning if any officials within his Department received performance-related bonuses in 2009-2010. (AQO 963/10)

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

I can confirm that no senior official in my Department has received a performance-related bonus in 2009-2010. The 2009-2010 pay award for non-industrial civil servants below Senior Civil Service grades, which was effective

from 1 August 2009, is the subject of ongoing negotiations. For some time, my Department has operated a reward and recognition scheme for staff below Senior Civil Service grade, which seeks, in a limited way, to acknowledge exceptional contributions made by individuals and teams outside normal duties. Under that scheme, 19 staff were allocated awards in 2009-2010, at a total cost of £7,150, equating to an average of £376 per person.

Mr W Clarke: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his response. Does he believe that it is appropriate to be awarding bonus payments in the current economic climate, given the hardship that many ordinary people face?

The Minister for Employment and Learning: As I said, in the particular case of my Department, a total of £7,000 in bonuses was spread over 19 individuals. Those bonuses have been a long-standing issue and they are for exceptional contributions made by individuals or teams of individuals. It should be borne in mind that the work that led to those bonuses was probably done in a previous period, but I accept the Member's point.

There has been a tendency in the Civil Service in the United Kingdom as a whole to move more towards bonuses. I suspect that the Chancellor at the time, Gordon Brown, may have had a say in that. The reason for that tendency is that bonuses do not have an impact on pensions, whereas increases in basic salaries do. I suspect that the now Prime Minister may have been wishing to encourage more bonuses, in so far as they do not have an implication for pensions.

Out of my Department's total budget of over £800 million, something in the region of £7,000 is not unreasonable. However, I accept the Member's fundamental point, which is to question whether we should have any bonuses of any description. That matter would have to be negotiated between the Minister of Finance and Personnel and the trade unions concerned. I know that a lot of bonuses have attracted negative attention, and I understand that none has been awarded in the Senior Civil Service grades this year, which I suspect to be in accordance with public opinion.

Programme-led Apprenticeship Scheme

5. **Mr Buchanan** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of the effectiveness of the programme-led apprenticeship scheme. (AQO 964/10)

7. **Mr A Maskey** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what consultation took place with employers and employer representative bodies before the recent changes to the programme-led apprenticeship scheme. (AQO 966/10)

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

With your permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, I will take questions 5 and 7 together.

Feedback on the programme-led apprenticeship scheme has been varied. There is an appreciation that the Department is responding to the very real problem of the lack of employment of apprentices in the economic downturn, and some sectors support the concept of the scheme. However, some sectors have concerns that the programme could discourage employers from employing apprentices.

The programme has proven to be very popular, with almost 3,000 young people participating in it. It is too soon to assess its effectiveness, but the fact that the programme is based on normal apprenticeship frameworks should help participants to progress to employed apprentice status when the economy picks up.

In the meantime, my Department is trying to address the issue of employer placements by introducing some flexibility into the placement arrangements. The proposed changes to the programme have not yet been introduced. The Department has met the Alliance of Sector Skills Councils to provide it with an opportunity to reflect employers' views on the issue. The Department will continue to work with sector skills councils in implementing any changes to the programme.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to reiterate my personal commitment to the employer-led ApprenticeshipsNI programme as the preferred model for apprenticeships in Northern Ireland. However, employers have a responsibility to make that work by employing apprentices where possible.

Mr Buchanan: I thank the Minister for his response. Does the Minister agree that the ongoing impact of the recession, including the

longer-term trend towards higher unemployment, is likely to have a negative effect on the initiative? Is he satisfied that the business and industry sectors and all the other employers are fully engaged in the initiative?

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

There are 25 sector skills councils in Northern Ireland, and they have varying footprints according to size. They are fully engaged in the initiative, and they are the voice of the employer as far as the exercise is concerned. We have had a debate on the matter and a number of questions have been asked. I remind Members that in the summer of last year, when we were making the decision about programme-led apprenticeships, we were, in my view, forced into it because employers were not prepared to take on apprentices. Many of the key private sector groups that would normally have taken on substantial numbers of apprentices were not taking on any, and that included some of our biggest companies.

I believe that we all accept that an employer-led apprenticeship, with the apprentice being employed by an employer, is the best route. However, employers were not coming forward with placements. What were we to do with thousands of young people last September? The consequence of going down the route of programme-led apprenticeships was that that had to take place largely in the colleges. The young people have voted with their feet, as almost 3,000 of them have taken up those apprenticeships. When the scheme was introduced, I said that we would be reviewing it continuously in light of experience. I assure the Member that we have consulted all the employers, and we are about to make more flexible changes to the work placement aspect. The big problem that we have with the scheme is that only just over half of the young people have work placements. None of us can force the issue. The only way in which young people can get real hands-on experience is for employers to co-operate. We are able to produce a simulated work environment, perhaps in colleges or with a training provider, but that is not the best option.

Like the Member, I believe that an employer-led apprenticeship is the best scheme. However, what were we to do with thousands of young people in the meantime? They are better in programme-led apprenticeships than on jobseekers allowance, which is one of the alternatives.

Mr A Maskey: Can the Minister give details of the number of employers or employer-representative bodies that he has consulted?

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

We have consulted them all. The Alliance of Sector Skills Councils represents the 25 sector skills councils and that is the main channel of communication. The Member will know, because I am sure that he has been lobbied, that some groups are uncomfortable with us because they wanted to ensure that the employer-led scheme remained, and they felt that that was best for their long-term interests. However, if we had not introduced the programme-led scheme, there would have been nothing for thousands of young people. Although I would prefer an employer-driven and employer-led arrangement, we took the view that an emergency measure had to be brought in. I will keep it under review, but I assure the Member that the consultation that we have held through the Alliance of Sector Skills Councils is the right route. That is what the councils are there for, and they are able to feed back to us the views of employers, which we will take into account. We have been listening, and we will make alterations to the scheme to make it more flexible with regard to work placements. However, the big problem that remains is that nearly half of the young people do not have a work placement.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The Minister touched on the issue that I wanted to raise, which is the fact that around 50% of apprentices do not achieve their placements. However, I am anxious to pursue the matter a bit further. What consultation or engagement has taken place with employers to find out what incentives they are asking for from the Department to take on young people so that those young people can complete their apprenticeships and go on to complete their NVQs?

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

Members will be aware that there is already a financial incentive for an employer to take on an apprentice, and a further financial incentive is paid to the employer if that apprentice completes the course. The big problem is that, in a downturn, it is difficult for employers to make existing members of their workforce redundant and then bring in people who were not there before. The Member will understand that that is a huge difficulty.

As far as the consultation is concerned, we have a structure. That is what the sector skills councils are there for. We are contributing financially towards their work, and I believe that that is the right framework. We also have our skills adviser, Bill McGinnis, who is regularly in touch with employers about the future.

Apprentices who have work placements can get their NVQs while those who do not can get a certificate, but when they eventually get into employment, they can complete their NVQs. Therefore, the work and time are not wasted, and the young people will ultimately be able to get an NVQ when they eventually get a work placement or a job. In the meantime, they will get a certificate that is of value to them and shows that they have undergone the programme-led apprenticeship scheme. That is of advantage to them even if it is not as good as getting an NVQ. There is no barrier to them ultimately getting an NVQ.

South Eastern Regional College, Bangor

6. **Dr Farry** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on the new performing arts centre and technology innovation centre at the South Eastern Regional College, Bangor. (AQO 965/10)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: The proposed performing arts centre and technology innovations centre capital development project in Bangor has completed the initial stage of procurement, which identified a shortlist of five contractors. However, due to a reduction in the Department's capital budget for 2010-11, the tendering stage has been suspended. A bid for additional resources will be made at the next available opportunity.

Dr Farry: I thank the Minister for that answer. He will be aware that the South Eastern Regional College is already one of the top 30 colleges in the UK and has ambitions to be one of the top 20 in the world by 2020. How can the Minister give confidence that colleges, such as the South Eastern Regional College, will actually be able to deliver the skills for the future and help the step change in our economy if the Department and the Executive cannot guarantee that investment is made in basic infrastructure, such as that project?

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

First of all, I am for the project. It was in my

Department's programme, and it had gone to tender stage, but when the Department of Finance and Personnel came knocking a couple of months ago, we were asked to examine the whole capital programme. That particular project was the only one for which the contracts had not been formally signed off and, therefore, for which we would not suffer a financial loss by pulling out.

The position is that the South Eastern Regional College, which is an excellent college, has received, at £52 million, the largest capital development support of any college in the past two years. It has developments in Lisburn, and those in Downpatrick — phases one and two — Ballynahinch, Newcastle and Newtownards are proceeding. It has the biggest capital building programme of any college in Northern Ireland.

If the Member looks at the further education estate in general, he will see that it has been practically rebuilt, with help from the Department, over the past few years. The Northern Regional College is the one on which there is most still to do.

I am very proud of what we have achieved. It has been achieved because we put a big effort into creating a proper environment for our young people — and not so young — to study in. The South Eastern Regional College is an excellent college. I have been to many of its events, and I look forward to going to the opening of further South Eastern Regional College campuses in the coming weeks.

3.30 pm

Executive Committee Business

Budget (No. 2) Bill: Second Stage

Debate resumed on motion:

That the Second Stage of the Budget (No. 2) Bill [NIA 11/09] be agreed. — [The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr S Wilson).]

The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel (Ms J McCann): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. At its meeting on 10 March 2010, the Committee took evidence from senior Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) officials on the Budget (No. 2) Bill, the general principles of which are being debated in the Chamber. In addition to the departmental briefing, the Committee received relevant papers on financial issues from the Assembly and Executive Review Committee as appropriate. I thank colleagues from that Committee for their co-operation.

The Bill authorises spending for 2010-11 for the new Department of Justice, the Public Prosecution Service and the Office of the First Minister and the deputy First Minister as detailed in the Main Estimates, which were debated in the Assembly earlier. The Committee for Finance and Personnel received notice from the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and the deputy First Minister that it has considered the relevant provisions in the Estimates and the Bill pertaining to the Departments and that it is content with the proposals.

The Committee for Finance and Personnel is mindful of the consequences for the policing and justice bodies if the Bill were not to pass through the Assembly before the Easter recess and if it were not to receive Royal Assent before policing and justice powers were transferred. In that context, the Committee was satisfied that appropriate consultation had been carried out with it on the public expenditure proposals in the Bill in accordance with Standing Order 42(2) and is content that the Bill can proceed by accelerated passage. I wrote to the Speaker to confirm that on 16 March 2010.

Members will be aware that recent in-year monitoring statements by the Minister of Finance

and Personnel to the Assembly have indicated lower levels of underspend and tighter financial management across Departments than has been the case previously. Although scope exists to improve further the financial performance and efficiency of Departments, there can be no doubt that progress in that area has been due, at least in part, to the closer scrutiny that locally elected representatives have undertaken in the Assembly. The Committee expects that DFP and the new Committee for justice will exercise that same challenge function for the new Department and its agencies, including placing a focus on realising proper efficiencies and maximising the impact from available resources.

In a written submission to the Committee on the review of the 2010-11 spending plans, the Economic Research Institute stated that policing and justice costs could create significant public expenditure pressures. It was suggested that matters such as security and law tend to squeeze out other things. In that context, I consider it important that DFP assess the longer-term impact that policing and justice will have on the Executive's wider public expenditure plans.

The potential for further pressures on an already overstretched financial position again highlights the need to put in place more effective processes both for establishing and reviewing Budgets and Programmes for Government and for the monitoring and management of in-year expenditure, particularly moving into the next spending review period. The Committee looks forward to meaningful engagement with DFP in that regard in the near future.

Mr Hamilton: I support the passage of the Budget (No. 2) Bill. I will talk about two broad themes. The topic of inheritance was spoken about in the previous debate, and I have no doubt that it will also be raised in this debate. The resources that are available to the Finance Minister to dispense to justice are largely as a result of inherited sums from direct rule. As the Finance Minister pointed out, that is not particularly unusual; it has certainly not been unusual for this Assembly in the past few years. In fact, expenditure in the first year of devolution was inherited from direct rule, and it was a year or so before we had a Budget of our own that we could genuinely say was made in Northern Ireland.

Inheritance has two effects, the first of which is on financial management. The financial manage-

ment situation that the Executive inherited three years ago was not pretty. Members will recall the vast amount of habitual underspend across virtually all Northern Ireland Departments in the past. However, as a result of collective pressure from Ministers, particularly the Finance Minister, the Executive, the Committees and Members of the House, financial management in the Assembly has improved drastically over the past number of years, to the extent that departmental underspend was down to around 0.2% last year. If that figure is wrong, I am sure that the Minister will be quick to correct me. It may not be exactly right, but approximately £200 million of additional resources, which resulted from that sound and prudent financial management, has been spent in the past financial year. I will touch on the issue of resources in my second point.

As well as inheriting expenditure plans, we inherit the historical attitude of the Northern Ireland Office to financial management. I ask the Minister to address the historical financial performance of the soon to be old NIO. I make that request because, if our experience of inheriting 11 Departments is anything to go by, the NIO will not have been subject to the new standards that we have set for ourselves in this institution. A new broom is required, and the Finance Minister must work closely with the Justice Minister, whoever that might be, to ensure that the new Department of Justice is as tight a financial ship as any other devolved Department.

The second broad area that I wish to address on the issue of inheritance is that of sufficient resources. The debate about sufficient resources has tended to concentrate on the headline figures in the financial package. However, the new Justice Minister will have at his or her disposal more than £800 million that was secured as part of that financial package, as well as more than £1 billion of resources. All Departments demand that sufficient resources be made available to enable them to do their jobs, and the Justice Department will be no different.

The Chair of the Finance Committee referred to the perception that the Justice Department will require more resources than other Departments because of the nature of policing and justice issues. She said that that trump card will be played to secure adequate resources to ensure that the police and the various other agencies in the wider justice family do the job that the

Justice Minister wants them to do. However, that job has been assisted greatly by the securing of a financial package that will range from £800 million to £1.2 billion, depending on future financial circumstances. The Bill touches on and inherits some of the key elements of that.

I wish to pause there for a moment. The work of the Assembly and Executive Review Committee, which was backed up by the professional support of the Economic Research Institute of Northern Ireland (ERINI), placed a headline figure of £656 million on immediate pressures. Therefore, the securing of a financial package that was well in excess of that amount underscores the importance of the work and labour that was invested in it. Had that financial package not been secured, there is no doubt that the job of a future Justice Minister would have been made all the more difficult.

The financial package will help to address claims for hearing loss, for which the Executive, in any year, must find only the first £12 million of a claim that may total hundreds of millions. It also helps to address the issue of pensions, with which the Minister dealt earlier, and the habitual overspend on legal aid. The financial package also secures access to the Reserve, thereby giving us a comfort blanket, should one be required to tackle the dissident threat. The money from the army bases that have been gifted to the Government may not be realisable on the open market now. However, the bases represent huge potential for the future regeneration and redevelopment of the areas in which they are sited. Of course, I do not want to omit the £20 million that was secured for payments to the part-time Reserve.

What is all the more remarkable about the scale of the financial package is that it was secured in the middle of a downturn and at a time when many people said that we were foolhardy to go after it. Indeed, there are some Members who would have settled for much less than the figure that we ultimately achieved. It is worth noting again the hard work and endeavour that was put in by the First Minister, the deputy First Minister, the Finance Minister and others in the Executive to secure the package so that there would be as solid a financial foundation as possible on which justice could be devolved.

From my work in the Assembly and Executive Review Committee on the immediate financial pressures and, indeed, on future financial

pressures, I know that the issue of suitable and sufficient resources will not end with this financial package. Similar to every Department, the Department of Justice will have to grapple with ongoing and future challenges, not least the reform of the probation service and the Prison Service. Although we have money to cover the immediate legal aid problem, the problems of habitual underspend will, in all likelihood, continue into the future. We must get to grips with that. There is also expenditure, particularly on the capital side, in our courts, and there is the potential impact of the equal pay claim as it rolls through the Department of Justice.

There are undoubted challenges ahead. However, I would rather that the Finance Minister, any new Justice Minister, and we, as an Assembly, deal with those challenges ourselves. It is much better, as we grapple with those challenges, that that is done by locally elected and locally accountable politicians. As we seek to develop a world-class justice system in Northern Ireland, which is a goal that I hope we all share, sufficient resources will have to be in place. However, that goal will be much easier to achieve if power is in local hands rather than where it currently resides in the hands of direct rulers.

Mr B McCrea: There was an earlier debate during which much of what we have to say was said. Therefore, I do not propose to reiterate much, other than to say that our best wishes for this place are that it gets to grips with the very real challenges that are facing us all. From my background on the Policing Board, it seems to me that there will be significant issues regarding financing that will require a consensus to be formed, and the way in which to do that is through the building of a genuine four party — perhaps even five party — coalition. However, it is important that respect is given to the mandate that is held by all in the Chamber as we try to work out the way forward. That is the basis on which the UUP has made its position on the matter clear. We are interested in building genuine government for the betterment of all people in Northern Ireland.

Mr A Maginness: I declare an interest as a member of the Prison Service Trust and as a barrister-at-law.

Today is a good day and another step towards the full devolution of justice and policing, which will, inevitably, transform the Assembly. It will

make the Assembly better and give it additional powers over issues that matter to ordinary citizens in our communities. Therefore, it is important that we give this a fair wind. That is not to say that we cannot raise issues of concern. However, in general terms, this is an important step forward and should be appreciated as such.

This is an opportune time for the Assembly to collectively appraise policing and justice issues in a budgetary context. We now have the opportunity to be visionary, imaginative and innovative in addressing policing and justice issues. As legislators, we can have a direct input on many areas of law and order and justice at large. We should welcome that, be bold and ambitious about a fresh start and give leadership on policing and justice. We have a wonderful opportunity to advance a range of issues. I cannot exhaustively go through every area that I would like to touch on today, but I want to address several issues.

3.45 pm

It is safe to say that, on the day after the election of the Justice Minister, which is scheduled for 12 April 2010, judges will still be judges, police officers will still be police personnel, and all will continue to do their jobs. However, as legislators, we can provide a new political and administrative context in which they carry out their work, and we have a duty to shape and form policies that will address the needs of the entire community in a sensitive and effective way. We should acknowledge that a local Administration can bring about positive change and provide local answers to local problems.

Much has been achieved in policing since the formation of the PSNI in 2001, but more must be done. The Patten report must be truly fulfilled. In particular, we should strive to create effective and real community policing, which is one aim of Patten that has not yet been achieved. Community policing is not an add-on or a separate part of policing, and, therefore, it must be integral. Ordinary policing should be community policing; there should be nothing extraordinary about it. There should not be regular police and community police. Community policing must be at the very heart of our policing agenda.

I want a situation in which police officers are a natural part of our community. I want there to be

nothing unusual about seeing police officers in supermarkets, leaving their children to school, attending church or being involved in sports. I want police officers to live in the communities that they police. If we can achieve that, we will have achieved a great deal. Police officers have not lived in certain parts of our community for several decades, and, as a result, those who are policed in those areas regard them as outsiders. That situation must end.

As the Minister highlighted during his opening remarks, policing has attracted a huge budget. We must ensure that that budget is spent effectively and that no money is wasted. Every penny must be spent in the interests of taxpayers. The fact is that money must be spent on policing, and it is an expensive business. Not only must salaries be paid to police personnel, but backup is often required, and the police estate is huge. As a legislature, our scrutiny role means that we can ensure that the money is spent effectively. That is very important for us to remember on the cusp of a new era for policing in this community.

There is a wide canvas of justice issues. We have to convert the bones of the Department of Justice into a local Ministry that, instead of being the remnants of direct rule, is a full part of our Administration. It is important that the Department of Justice is not seen as something from outside and that it is fully integrated into our Administration. That will be a difficult task after many years of direct rule. The Department of Justice must be sensitive to the needs of local people, which is a huge challenge for it and any Justice Minister.

There are many other challenges that present themselves. We want to see the development of a charter of rights for all victims of crime. We must become more conscious of the needs of victims of crime and we must dispel the notion among the public that the justice system is concerned only about the perpetrators of crime. We must dispel that commonly held notion among the public and make our courts more sensitive to the needs of victims. That will mean an additional cost, but it will be money well spent if it assuages the concerns of ordinary citizens and gives comfort to people unfortunate enough to be victims of crime.

We should also look at the whole suite of recommendations of the Criminal Justice Inspection, which are a result of its intensive

examination of various bodies in the justice system. We must draw up a compendium of the outstanding recommendations, systematically look at them and apply them to the agencies and institutions that they will benefit. We should collate those recommendations and ensure that they are all systematically tackled.

There must also be a reform of the Prison Service. That has been made plain in many different reports by the Criminal Justice Inspection. There must be, in the words of the Criminal Justice Inspection, a “culture change” in our prisons. Such change would not be without a cost benefit, because, as we know, there is a high cost associated with looking after prisoners in our penal institutions. We have to look at that carefully. There will be a financial benefit from change and a benefit for those who are incarcerated.

There are many people who leave prison who have not been rehabilitated, are in a state of continued mental ill health and have drug or alcohol dependencies. We have got to help those people to reintegrate into our society. That good will be reflected in financial savings to our public services and our social services. There is net benefit in reforming our penal system. The first step towards that must be to concentrate our resources on Hydebank Wood and on dealing with young offenders. There is insufficient concentration of resources there. The regime is not sufficiently enlightened and will not assist the rehabilitation of young offenders effectively. That is a vital first step in changing a culture that desperately needs to be changed. The incoming Department of Justice must consider that matter carefully.

There is the prospect of a new prison. I am not sure how that will affect the prison estate. The Executive have had discussions on that issue, and the First Minister and deputy First Minister have discussed it with the Prime Minister. Some money is available, and I hope that that money is guaranteed, because it is necessary, particularly for Magilligan. However, we must be imaginative when we redevelop the prison estate. It is not sufficient simply to build an all-purpose prison and replicate the mistakes of the past. Our approach to tackling offending and reoffending in our society must be imaginative.

There is no reason to build one institution for everybody; we should consider different facilities for different parts of the North. For example,

a women's facility is, undoubtedly, required. Such a facility should be firmly detached from a major prison setting and will be of great benefit to female prisoners. They are a different type of offender, and it is important that we have effective resources at our disposal to deal with them. That will benefit society overall and will prevent further reoffending by female prisoners. The prospect of a new prison or prison facilities opens up the possibility of a new culture that, importantly, will create real change in our penal institutions.

Another painful issue that springs to mind is that of the Public Prosecution Service (PPS). We were all painfully reminded of that during the recent Thomas Devlin trial. Without the persistence, tenacity and courage of Thomas Devlin's parents, there would have been no prosecution in that case. It is a timely reminder to all of us of the need to examine the PPS and its work. There are many good people in the PPS, and I have great respect for the Director of Public Prosecutions. However, we must examine that body's work and determine how to improve it.

The PPS's lack of accountability to any institution in Northern Ireland, particularly to the Assembly, is a serious problem. The PPS is a non-ministerial department and will be funded by the Department of Finance and Personnel. That situation arose as a result of disagreement between various parties during negotiations in the lead-up to the devolution of policing and justice powers.

No agreement could be reached on which Department should fund the PPS. Some parties wanted it to be funded by the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM), and others wanted it to be funded by the Department of Justice. Of course, the latter suggestion is, in my and the SDLP's view, the correct and logical one.

4.00 pm

It is envisaged that the appointments of the Director of the Public Prosecution Service and a deputy director would be made in future by the Attorney General. That seems a strange mechanism for those appointments. It seems to me that any interface between the Assembly or the Minister of Justice and the PPS is remote indeed. That is neither healthy nor good.

I emphasise that the independent decision-making of the Director of the Public Prosecution Service must be safeguarded.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member must return to the content of the Bill. You are wandering a little from the subject matter of the debate.

Mr A Maginness: I talked a lot about the funding of the PPS, Mr Deputy Speaker. It is important that, in the context of funding a public body that will expend a lot of public money — some £30 million — we have proper lines of accountability. In that sense, it is germane to the Budget (No. 2) Bill to discuss those lines of accountability. If we do not have those, the Assembly will have less control over the funding of the PPS.

Sentencing is a big issue, which is directly relevant to the functioning of the PPS and its interface with the public. It is of considerable concern to the public that, in fact, the PPS and the courts get things wrong. Under the new regime, the Director of the PPS will decide whether a sentence should be referred to the Court of Appeal. In such a situation, the public will have little input. At present, at least, an Assembly Member or a Member of Parliament can approach or write to the Attorney General to ask that matters be referred to the Court of Appeal. We will not have that right as Members of the Assembly, which will be unfortunate when it comes to cases in which sentences are inappropriate.

It is important to note that there will be no direct accountability to the Assembly. The Attorney General will, effectively, act as a messenger to the Assembly from the PPS by way of an annual report. That is not sufficient, nor is it good enough. It is not right that questions of public importance that affect the PPS should be referred through the Attorney General.

It is also said that the Director of the Public Prosecution Service would seek to provide relevant information as a matter of practice. However, that is not sufficient either. Therefore, I do not believe that such a situation would interfere with the quasi-judicial role of the Director of the Public Prosecution Service.

The Law Commission is another institution that we should consider. It will, of course, be financed by the Assembly, and it is a tremendous resource for us as legislators. It will provide invaluable help to the Assembly and will look carefully and in expert detail at areas of law that we

wish to reform. It is currently looking at land law, business tenancies, multi-unit contracts and the law relating to apartments. It is also looking at the law on vulnerable witnesses and their protection, as well as at bail laws. I cannot think of anything more pertinent at this moment in time. We have heard people discussing bail and related issues many times in the Chamber. In those circumstances, it is appropriate for us to further examine the work of the Law Commission and to support that work through proper financing. If the proper finance is not there, we cannot get the necessary expertise to provide the help that is needed.

I am not telling the Finance Minister that the money is inappropriate, but if we want to expand the work of the Assembly and if Ministers or Departments want to engage in specific research work in reforming the law that relates to their Departments, they can commission the Law Commission to do such tasks. That facility is there. It has not been used to date, but it exists.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel

(Mr S Wilson): The Member is wrong. The Law Commission can do valuable work. It is going to conduct the research work on the issue that was debated here not so long ago on the management of shared areas in apartment developments. Hopefully, that will indicate to us what legislative or other changes are required.

Mr A Maginness: I think that the Minister misunderstood me. I said that the Law Commission does good work and can be of invaluable assistance to the Assembly and to various Departments because it has the remit to do so. It is permitted to engage with Departments directly. Departments can ask the Law Commission to explore or research areas of law and come up with solutions to particular legal problems or to examine law reform in the area of competence in question.

The Minister is right in saying that the Law Commission is looking at multi-unit contracts and the law pertaining to apartments. That is important work. That issue was debated in the Assembly, and I believe that the Law Commission's work on that matter was partly influenced by the debate. My point is that the resource is there and that we, as an Assembly, are financing it and that it is an important resource. We can expand that funding if necessary if there are particular problems to be addressed.

Legal aid is another important area. The Minister indicated that there will be an increase of £20 million for legal aid.

It is important that the independence of the judiciary is preserved; all Members support that. It is also important that the independence of the legal profession is preserved. The legal profession can start to decline if it is underfunded with respect to public finance, which has happened in Britain.

Mr Spratt: The Assembly and Executive Review Committee took evidence concerning legal aid, and there is a deficit of £20 million or £30 million a year in the legal aid budget. However, one of the revelations during the evidence to the Assembly and Executive Review Committee was that legal aid is three times more costly in Northern Ireland than it is in other parts of the United Kingdom. When questioned specifically about that, officials said that one of the reasons is that, in Northern Ireland, there is a solicitor, a junior council and a senior council whereas, in other parts of the United Kingdom, one lawyer deals with the entire process.

Does the Member agree that, when policing and justice powers are devolved, the Assembly needs to seriously examine legal aid in its entirety and how we deal with it compared to other parts of the United Kingdom? Legal aid is far too expensive here. It is well and truly an area in which money could be saved rather than going into lawyers' pockets day after day.

Mr A Maginness: There needs to be a serious consideration of legal aid. Indeed, the Westminster Government has made various attempts to examine it in Northern Ireland. Various suggestions have been made, but no firm conclusions have been reached. However, I must warn the House that the English legal aid reforms have not worked; they have created bad situations in many parts of England, with many people being denied access to proper legal advice or representation. There are two aspects of legal aid, namely criminal legal aid and civil legal aid. I refer to the civil side rather than the criminal side, although the criminal side is affected as well.

Going to a civil court is an expensive business for most people in society. If reasonable access to justice for most ordinary people is to be preserved, we must have a system of legal aid. I believe that we can have a civil legal aid system that pays for itself rather than being a burden

on the public purse; that operates effectively and efficiently; and that allows the greatest number of people in our society to access legal services. We need a local solution to legal aid.

Given that there have been so many attempts to reform legal aid; there is a good opportunity for us to learn lessons from England. We should import what is good in the English system and reject what is bad. We have to look at the matter in depth, both on the civil side and the criminal side. As Mr Spratt said, it is important that we do not simply enrich an exclusive elite of lawyers. We must provide a service to which ordinary people have access and that benefits the legal profession but not disproportionately.

4.15 pm

I also want to raise a matter in relation to the victims of violent crime. Every day, Members and the public say that victims should come first, but our system for compensating the victims of violent crime is most unfair. Only a couple of weeks ago, I dealt with a case in my constituency where a lady whose husband had been murdered was entitled to £12,000, not a huge amount of money for a bereaved person. However, as a result of her husband's criminal convictions for traffic offences — for traffic offences — her award was reduced from £12,000 to £3,000. I cannot believe that it is fair to punish a widow for her husband's traffic offences. That system was introduced some years ago and has been refined since to cut costs and reduce the compensation that people receive. I do not think that right; we should compensate people properly. The widow's three children suffered the same reduction in compensation. How the children can have offended to be punished in that way, I do not know. We should revisit how we deal with compensation for criminal injuries.

The criminal justice review should be seriously and systematically revisited so that we can see what areas are outstanding and what needs to be implemented. We need to set up a sentencing guidelines council to advise the judiciary, as many Members are concerned about sentencing. We must look at knife crime, the offences that arise from it and the penalties for it.

We must also look at enhancing and supporting the Equality Commission and the Human Rights Commission. I know that the Human Rights Commission is not funded directly by the

Assembly; nonetheless, we need to support it and it is within the remit of the First Minister and the deputy First Minister. I hope that they see fit to give political support to those bodies. I see the Minister of Finance and Personnel smile, but my message is clear. If the First Minister and the deputy First Minister cannot support institutions designed to bring about equity, equality and justice, it is as though they do not support the courts. It is as simple as that. Those two bodies must have political support.

I note that the Civic Forum is mentioned in the Bill in relation to the Office of the First Minister and the deputy First Minister. Where does the Civic Forum lie in the agenda of the Office of the First Minister and the deputy First Minister? It seems to have sunk without trace. Politically, it should be revived; it is necessary to remind the First Minister and the deputy First Minister of the Civic Forum's importance.

We need to see good, systematic co-operation between North and South on policing and justice issues. That is essential. We can see in topical issues such as child abuse —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. Will the Member return to the subject matter, which is the Budget, not policy.

Mr A Maginness: It is relevant, in so far as North/South justice co-operation requires financial support. In those circumstances, therefore, it is quite relevant to the debate. I cannot see any reference to North/South support in the Bill. That is a crucial element to expanding justice co-operation, North and South. If financial support is not there — and I am making a very real point, Mr Deputy Speaker, and not a spurious point, as you may suspect — then we cannot properly put North/South co-operation on a firm institutional footing. Such financial support is essential.

I referred to the topical issue of child abuse, because that is a very serious issue. Those who commit child abuse can go south or north of the border, and some work has been done on that. However, there are other areas: road traffic, people evading justice, or people carrying out scams in one part of the country and operating in another. It is important, therefore, to have proper co-operation between North and South. We should be working towards having a criminal assets bureau that can operate throughout Ireland, because that is where a lot of damage

is being done, and it could be remedied by an effective North/South axis.

I have covered some, but not all, of the points about a justice agenda. I will leave the rest to my good friend Mr Attwood, because there is much more to be heard. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Members that I have allowed a degree of latitude. *[Laughter.]* With respect to the last Member to speak, I have allowed more than a degree of latitude. I ask Members to adhere to the subject matter at hand, which is the Budget Bill.

Dr Farry: Thank you very much, Mr Deputy Speaker. I will endeavour to adhere to your ruling, and avoid the temptation to go through some sort of manifesto on the financial aspects for a future Justice Department. The Alliance Party has its own policies on its website, if anyone is interested.

The debates in recent weeks about getting devolution agreed, or even what is agreed today about what is, in essence, a legacy Budget are not so important. What is important is what we do with the Budget, and what happens from here with regard to wider delivery issues. Simon Hamilton spoke about wanting a world-class justice system in Northern Ireland. I echo that sentiment. Alban Maginness mentioned the importance of innovation. Those are things that we can look forward to. The opportunity in Northern Ireland is good, because we have an almost unique set of circumstances through having coterminosity between the agencies. With devolution, we will have a Northern Ireland Department of Justice, and many of the agencies with which that Department will interact, and indeed the other Departments with which it will interact, are based in the same jurisdiction. Therefore, we can have a situation in which people are able to talk directly, at a horizontal level, to their counterparts in agencies and also benefit from a proper degree of vertical accountability. We will see what can be done, but a good opportunity exists.

There are some positive aspects to our justice system. I will not go through them in detail, but the Police Service of Northern Ireland has undergone substantial change and is subject to an acute accountability regime. The Youth Justice Agency's work is world-class, and the Criminal Justice Inspection is an innovative organisation. Nevertheless, we face interlinked challenges in that we must keep people safe at

home and on the streets; ensure that the overall criminal justice system, and individual agencies, is seen to deliver services effectively and fairly; and, given the scarcity of available resources, ensure that justice is delivered efficiently and effectively.

The Government's financial package is generous, and we must recognise that, compared with the rest of the United Kingdom, the overall justice funding regime is also generous. Even within that regime, substantial cost pressures exist, whereby things could be done better with additional resources. There are areas that we have been unable to fund, even though we would like to have done so.

Nonetheless, in the current circumstances, the status quo is not sustainable. Some factors that affect the status quo are due to the circumstances in which Northern Ireland finds itself, so we have to find other ways to tackle those issues, such as through good politics, good governance, by building a shared future and by taking on the dissident republicans through a united front in the Assembly.

There are areas in which costs are not justifiable, and it is important that not only the new Minister but the Committee, the Assembly and the Executive come to terms with them. I shall consider those areas in which cost pressures exist and in which a changed approach might find savings. This is an idea of how we could do things better, particularly with respect to the financial aspects of the challenge. Focusing on prevention and early intervention is logical. The earlier that one intervenes, the lower the cost. The later that one leaves it, the greater the cost that must be picked up. Of course, the difficulty is that agencies often have a statutory obligation to intervene late in the process when costs are higher. Early intervention is often seen as optional, and, in tight financial circumstances, early interventions are the first to go. In many respects, that is a false economy.

Furthermore, it is important that justice interacts with the creation of a shared future in this society. The Department of Justice and the justice agencies have important roles to play in encouraging other Departments and agencies to create shared spaces and in protecting them when they have been created. We can also look forward to more visible policing on the ground and, perhaps, less accountability for the police. The longer the police can spend on the ground

interacting with the community, the more money will be saved by delivering a more cost-effective Police Service.

We should also consider the introduction of diversionary activities, which, on the one hand, may be more effective in rehabilitating offenders and, on the other, would save the system money because more costly interventions could be avoided later on. Similarly, we should consider alternatives to prosecutions as a way of not only providing a more effective response to low-level offending but delivering more cost-effective methods. In general, we should aim to manage and rehabilitate offenders more efficiently, particularly in the community. Shifting resources towards the management of offenders through a national offender management scheme makes much sense.

Savings could also be made through better co-operation among agencies, particularly those in the criminal justice system. For example, we must increase the speed of justice and tackle avoidable delays in the system. Northern Ireland is renowned for its slow criminal justice system, and, often, justice delayed is justice denied. We must come to terms with that.

Alban Maginness spoke about lawyers, and the approach to case management must be considered. Although I appreciate the fact that a number of factors in Northern Ireland lead to cases taking longer here than elsewhere, the approach of some lawyers often contributes to delays.

Although we talk about the accountability of the PPS and other agencies, it is important that we recognise the accountability of the legal profession, particularly when what is being done puts public money at stake. The Criminal Justice Board will have a critical role in the co-ordination of those agencies.

4.30 pm

There is also the issue of what co-operation there can be between Departments in Northern Ireland and agencies under those Departments, particularly at a local level. I return to the point that I made earlier: the Assembly must avoid the danger of regarding the justice budget as simply an add-on to the existing Budget. The devolution of policing and justice has to be regarded as an opportunity for all Departments to re-examine their budgets and to consider whether they can spend their money more

effectively and efficiently in the new context of devolved justice powers. Justice should not be in its own silo. Its product — a safer community — can be delivered only through joined-up working by Departments.

To date, the response from Departments has been patchy. There are huge opportunities to address issues around offender management and the prevention of offending. In particular, the Department for Social Development, the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, the Department for Employment and Learning and the Department of Education all have something to bring to the table. Only some Departments, such as DSD and DEL, have even mentioned future opportunities. Others have not recognised that things can be done differently. For example, there are huge opportunities for the Health Department to interact with the Justice Department to address the high incidence of mental health and personality disorder problems in the offender population. The more effective the system is in preventing offences or rehabilitating offenders with particular problems, the less cost there will be, because people will be less likely to offend.

Similar issues apply to managing access to alcohol, the consumption of which lies at the heart of many offences committed in Northern Ireland, particularly by young people, but, I stress, not exclusively by young people. There are also opportunities for joint departmental working on capital projects. Desertcreat may be devolution's flagship capital project, but there remains a question mark over the important contribution that the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety has to make. Given the training situation for fire and rescue personnel in Northern Ireland, the Department must face up to that issue sooner rather than later.

Finally, I turn to the particular short-term pressures that will be faced by the Justice Department. The starting point has to be the Police Service of Northern Ireland, which takes up a very large proportion of the overall justice budget. A Justice Minister and the Assembly may have little control over the detail of how that budget will be spent — that is a matter for the Chief Constable and the Policing Board — but the Assembly will have to deal with the headline allocation to the Police Service and any additional pressures that emerge. We must appreciate the current lack of flexibility in how the Chief

Constable can allocate resources, although that may well change in the future. Obviously, we will be keen to support the Chief Constable's vision of placing greater emphasis on community policing, including visible policing on the ground to engage with people more effectively.

There is a particular legacy issue that relates to policing but which has not been touched on in the package from the Prime Minister, and that is the future of the Historical Enquiries Team (HET). I appreciate that, as a way of dealing with Northern Ireland's past, the Historical Enquiries Team is not everyone's cup of tea. Of itself, the team can be only one part of a wider equation. However, pending any wider resolution of how we as a society deal with the past, it is worth recognising that HET is probably the only area in which some results are being provided for families. Indeed, justice is being taken forward in a number of cases.

HET's funding is set to run out in 2011. As things stand, the Chief Constable will make a decision about its future funding in light of the choices to be made between policing the present and policing the past. Further consideration needs to be given to that area.

The current prisons situation is clearly not sustainable. It is an extremely difficult situation, given the legacy of our Prison Service's past, but we have some of the worst performing prisons in the UK while our cost per prisoner is more than twice the average. We cannot accept that. The Minister, Executive and Assembly will have to come to terms with that in the very near future and examine how sustainable reforms can be taken forward. All the different stakeholders have to be brought along with the process to ensure that we have a more cost-effective system that works in respect of the rehabilitation of offenders.

Alban Maginness focused on the issue of legal aid. Although we have additional funding from the Prime Minister, and although the historical inadequacy of the baseline for legal aid has been fixed, the status quo is still unsustainable. Change is not an option for the Assembly; it is something that must be grappled with in the near future. That includes looking at such issues as fee structures for the legal profession and the number of counsel who are eligible in particular circumstances. Obviously, we have to be very keen to ensure that we do not compromise accessibility to justice. At the same

time, however, we need to be conscious of the costs that are involved in the current regime and ask whether it provides the best value for money and whether things can be done differently. That does not mean that we simply have to copy what happens elsewhere in these islands because we are now in a devolved situation, but we have to create a solution in Northern Ireland that addresses our circumstances.

People inside and outside this Chamber have made the point that only a lawyer is qualified to be the Minister of Justice. In some circumstances, a different perspective of justice can be provided by a non-lawyer. The lawyers are only one aspect of a criminal justice system and, like a whole host of others, they have a vested interest. It is important that the people who take decisions in the future, be they the Minister, the Executive or the Assembly, are capable of taking a rounded perspective of what needs to be done. They should not bat for any one sector or try to defend any aspect of the status quo. They should seek to provide proper effective solutions that provide a genuine outcome for the people of Northern Ireland, and that, basically, amounts to people feeling safe in this community.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I listened very intently to what Mr Farry said. I hope that he does not want to exclude lawyers from any position about the place.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: That would not be a bad idea.

Mr McGlone: Just wait until you hear what is coming, Sammy. *[Laughter.]*

I welcome the budget that is being allocated to the Department of Justice. It will give realisation to the devolution of justice. It offers an opportunity for the whole of society to look at the commitment of the two parties in OFMDFM to transforming the dysfunctional Executive into an Executive who work for the benefit of all the people of the North and to help us to build the stability that is needed to move us through the political process and into real governance for all our people. That is why the SDLP supports the devolution of justice powers and the authorisation of the budget for the Justice Ministry.

At the very least, we expect that there will be no more blocking of meetings of the Executive. There should be no more threatening the stability of this Assembly by a party that could not admit

to the reality of, or could not understand, what it agreed previously. The justice budget is a key step in providing the stability that we hope to see in the weeks, months and years ahead.

It is only with that stability that we will see the required level of investment in our economy. As Mr Farry said earlier, we need assurances and commitments from the Executive that the moneys will be made fully available for a policing college from within Executive budgets, particularly for the constituency that I share with the deputy First Minister. It is imperative that we see that move for a new and proper start to policing.

Mr Spratt: Does the Member agree that it is imperative that the Department of Health commit now to the amount of money that it needs to put in for the Fire and Rescue Service? The whole project is now at a point where there is major spend on behalf of the Police Service and the Prison Service. Therefore, does he agree that the Minister of Health should commit to it now without any further delay?

Mr McGlone: I thank the Member for his intervention. I agree that the money should be made available in the ministerial budget. We have had meetings locally to move that on and have had buy-in from all parties. Indeed, your party colleague Mr Armstrong attended that meeting. We want to see the project move on.

Mr Spratt: He is not my party colleague.

Mr McGlone: Sorry. I get a bit mixed up when I look over at that Bench. It is a bit difficult sometimes, Mr Spratt, to determine who is who, or who was where, when and how.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I ask the Member to make his remarks through the Chair.

Mr McGlone: Sorry about that, Mr Deputy Speaker. Please give me a wee bit of forbearance on that.

Now that both parties in the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister recognise the importance of stability, we hope that, for those most recent converts, this latest conversion is a permanent one, because, until very recently, one of those parties was content to threaten the stability of the Assembly for its own narrow party political reasons.

I will move now to the issue of MI5 and SOCA. The justice budget does not cover expenditure

by agencies that the Minister will have no say in, namely the Serious Organised Crime Agency and the activities of MI5. Those agencies remain accountable only to Westminster, and any Northern Ireland Justice Minister will be told what those agencies allow that Minister to hear. Significantly, the protocol setting out those relationships applies both to the future activities of the security agencies and to the past. No doubt, some Members may be grateful for such a lack of transparency and accountability, but the SDLP is not. Indeed, given the sensitivity that the Regional Development Minister showed when SOCA took a closer look at the assets of one of his acquaintances, there may be certain logic for some in restricting the information available to the Executive on some of these matters.

On the North/South justice sector, which my colleague touched on earlier, the Justice Minister will have an important role working together with the Irish Justice Minister for the purpose of:

“facilitating more effective co-operation and coordination on criminal justice matters, including in combating criminal behaviour, working together in the prevention of crime and on community safety issues, and dealing with offenders after conviction.”

As we know, crime knows no boundaries, so it is crucial that the issue be dealt with.

The Justice Minister will also be responsible for taking forward proposals in other areas, which will be identified by the working group on criminal justice co-operation, in which co-operation on criminal justice matters could be enhanced or initiated. As my colleague Conall McDevitt has said, the proposals being brought forward to the Executive by the Minister of Health will provide one immediate area in which co-operation will be required. The ability of the Minister to develop better co-operation in those areas already identified, as well as in other areas yet to be identified, will be one measure of the new beginning that the public have been promised.

I will move now to the issue of criminal assets. As I have pointed out, the Serious Organised Crime Agency will not be accountable to the Justice Minister here, but that does not mean that the Justice Minister cannot develop better co-operation with his or her counterpart in the Republic in order to pursue criminal assets. Those who profiteered under the cover of conflict

should not be allowed to sleep easy in their beds. Those who continue to undermine legitimate businesses through their illegal activities must be shut down and brought before the courts. The Justice Minister will have the opportunity to make progress on that and other areas, with the proper resources and the proper budget.

4.45 pm

The parties who have promised a new beginning must not obstruct the work that is ahead of us in building that new society. Let us see the dysfunctional Executive transformed into one that works for the benefit of all the people of the North and for all the people of this island.

Mr Gallagher: I am the deputy chairperson of the Assembly all-party group on learning disability. The criminal justice system has an impact on the learning disabled, and that is particularly noticeable in relation to youth justice. There is a lack of investment in many of the programmes relating to the prevention of crimes.

Some 85% of the young people who are detained in Hydebank are likely to reoffend. It is clear that many of the young people who go there come from backgrounds of social deprivation, have low self-esteem and are unable to cope with the challenges of life. Due to their learning disabilities, they have serious problems with communication. Therefore, it is important that there be investment in educational opportunities to tackle the challenges that those young people face. That involves investment in staff, in the training of staff, and in the employment of people who have expertise in the delivery of specialist learning-disability services. Investment is also required in centres such as Hydebank, where young offenders are detained, to provide trained personnel who have the experience and ability to recognise at an early stage such conditions as learning disabilities, and, as is sometimes the case, mental health problems.

There are several other gaps in the system. Those vulnerable young people need support from the moment that they are brought to police stations to be charged. An appropriate-adult service exists, which provides support through the presence of an adult from outside who can be contacted and brought to a police station. However, there is a serious shortage of those individuals, and that must be put right. It can be put right only through more investment, not only to attract the individuals but to ensure that they

understand the most suitable form of support required for young people. When a duty sergeant asks such an individual to come to a police station, a young person is in a difficult situation, and one that they often do not understand. A hotline was set up recently up through which a young person who is alone in a police station in such circumstances can establish contact with somebody outside. That also needs more investment. I understand that the available personnel are in short supply, and the only way to address that is through the provision of more financial assistance.

The resettlement of offenders, particularly of those in the youth justice section, remains a significant problem. That can be sorted out only by attracting people with the appropriate qualifications and making the necessary investment for them.

I want to say a few words about environmental crime. All Members are familiar with the issue, particularly those who are involved in the Committee for the Environment or in discussions and debates on that subject. We are aware that the pollution of rivers and seas is ongoing and damage to wildlife through removal of hedges and destruction of habitats continues. Often, when individuals are brought to book for such offences, they get what many of us regard as a rap over the knuckles. That is the end of the matter, and the crimes continue.

There is a lack of appropriate penalties for such offences, which include the removal of sites and buildings that are of historical interest and, often, an important part of local culture. There are no proper penalties to deter people who are responsible for attacks on and, in some cases, the demolition of, those sites and buildings.

My colleague Alban Maginness mentioned the importance of a good North/South justice arrangement that is properly financed. One of the most important elements of North/South co-operation relates to the illegal dumping of waste, which has been ongoing for a number of years. Recently, we learned that someone has been fined for that offence. Questions have been asked repeatedly in the Assembly about the removal of waste that originated in the Republic and was dumped illegally in the North —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. I ask the Member to return to the subject of the debate, which is the budget, and not to talk about policies or what should or should not be done.

Mr Gallagher: I am attempting to do that, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Under the current legal system, some people have been apprehended and fined for the illegal dumping of waste. However, that has not dealt fully with the problem. That illegally dumped waste has yet to be removed. In that case, it will probably be removed at a cost to ratepayers in Dublin. In future, illegal dumping could occur the other way round, in which case ratepayers in the North would have to pay for its removal.

I am trying to say that the Assembly must examine how the law works here. All Members support the principle that the polluters should pay. However, when people have accepted illegal waste, the removal and remediation costs have been borne by ratepayers. The legal system must be such that the responsibility for bearing the cost of all such offences lies with the polluter. Let us be clear: the current system is inadequate and must be sorted out.

One way that the country got to grips with some of the problems that are associated with the illegal dumping of waste was through the setting up of an all-Ireland forum, which brought together representatives from local government and the police. That costs money because those who are involved are away from their work for days on end many times during the year. That body must be established formally and supported fully by the Department of Justice, because it does an extremely good job.

Thank you for your indulgence, Mr Deputy Speaker. Those important points relate to how the entire justice system works and is financed.

Mrs M Bradley: I am sorry that I was not in my place, Mr Deputy Speaker. I could not walk in front of the Member who was speaking and, therefore, could not get back there.

I want to say a few words on children and youth justice. The justice budget must be used to ensure that young people are protected by the justice system and feel that the youth justice system exists to protect their rights and best interests.

In our society it is often the case that many young people feel that they have nothing to lose and nothing to gain. However, the SDLP notes the 'Childhood in Transition' report and believes that some of its findings could be taken forward in the context of the devolution of policing and

justice. One especially worrying finding is that our children and young people feel that they are policed differently because of their age. It is our duty to instil a sense of belonging and citizenship into our young people. Furthermore, we should be working towards ensuring a sense of pride and public confidence in the youth justice system, so that young people are confident about their place in society, play a positive and a constructive role and become active citizens.

The SDLP wants to ensure that the justice budget is used to make communities safer and to make society stronger. Our justice system must exist to serve and protect the public by preventing offending and reducing reoffending, to serve victims and to instil public confidence in public safety.

It is also important to note that many of the young people who enter custody come from homes with complex family problems. Most of them have no accommodation or come from residential care, have poor educational attainment and are not in full-time education, training or employment. They may well have alcohol and drug abuse issues or mental health concerns. Common sense would tell us that if we tackle those issues head on, before they materialise and result in criminal behaviour, crime may be prevented. Funding for the Justice Department must go some way to addressing those issues. The current situation, in which children and young people who have been identified as being at risk cannot get access to services unless they have broken the law, is totally unacceptable. The Youth Justice Agency needs to be expanded and invested in, to meet the complex needs of many young people and provide them with the best service.

Funds from the justice budget should be used to find a different approach to custodial sentences for children and young people. Evidence shows us that prison hardens and further alienates young people who enter custody, and many reoffend. The reoffending rate for those in the young offenders' centre is 82.4%. The SDLP believes that that rate is far too high and that those who leave custody are not being supported enough. Investment is needed to ensure that they do not reoffend, and we need to target those young people and to provide extra support and services to reduce crime and to help people who do not have the opportunity to realise their full potential.

Finally, a system that puts an emphasis on utilising the skills of the young for the economic and social advancement of the North will help us to compete much better in a global economic system and to progress to become leading innovators in a competitive world.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I must admit that I was very impressed with your fleetness of foot.

Mr McDevitt: The question today is whether we are debating the cost of policing and the administration of a courts service and other services or whether we are debating the price of justice in this region. I can only conclude that it is the former. However, I suppose that that will at least put the necessary architecture in place.

The key question for us all must be whether, in this new Building of truth and edifice of justice, we are capable of delivering the change that is so desperately needed in this region. In my mind, no issue illustrates that change better than the pursuit of justice and truth for those who have been so let down by the state and the church. When we allocate £1.344 billion to a Department of Justice, Margaret McGuckin, Frances Reilly and John McCourt — the tiny tip of a huge iceberg looking for the truth after years of silence — are asking a basic question: will this region, born again in power sharing and in peace, change their lives? Twenty or 30 years ago, someone acting on its behalf sent them to the homes and institutions where they were denied their childhoods. This Budget (No.2) Bill — that is, the costs that we will allocate to be administered by ourselves — will be tested by those people against its ability to deliver justice and truth for them.

They may be only numbers on a page of blue paper today, but for hundreds, if not thousands, they are a key opportunity to change lives.

5.00 pm

Over the past few weeks, the issue has surfaced again in our minds. Many people well beyond the Chamber are reflecting on their past. However, we have the power and we will have the resources allocated today and passed on to us next month to be able to deliver a meaningful process of inquiry — if the resources are allocated — that will be capable of delivering change for those people who have waited so long for justice. Those people were denied a childhood, not just by the clerics and the members of the religious orders who abused them so terribly but by

the state, which committed them to that care. They were bathed in Jeyes Fluid. They are a living embodiment that the gap between a child perpetrator of crime and a child victim is so narrow that it is practically invisible.

When the House debates safeguarding legislation of a world standard, as it will next year, we will be mindful of the fact that we have — hopefully, because the budget will have allowed us to — begun a process that will mean that past generations can also look here and affirm that this House knows more than just the cost of the administration of justice and that it is conscious that no price can be put on truth.

The Budget also allocates £53,610,000 to the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister. Among the many things it will be expected to do with that money will be to promote human rights. I am sure that every Member will agree that we could promote no greater a right than the rights of the people of whom I have just spoken. It will put a duty on and allow the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to support children and young people. Is there any greater test than that which I have been talking about as a commitment and as evidence that we genuinely mean what we say and that those millions of pounds have some meaning?

We are also debating the allocation of resources that will allow us to work in a new way across this island in the delivery and administration of justice. For those people who fell under the dark shadow of clerics — ordinary boys and girls, children living in perfectly normal homes but who found themselves abused, not just physically but mentally and emotionally, by some tiny minority of clerics in this region — we must put in place a process that is capable of transcending the border. This budget allows us to do that. It will allow us to be able to explore, diocese by diocese, what went wrong and how we can right those wrongs.

Those millions and billions of pounds are not just numbers on a blue page; they are the last bastion of hope for some people on the island, and they are the opportunity for police services, social services, Prime Ministers, and First Ministers and deputy First Ministers to work together in a way in which they have never worked before. In the months and weeks ahead, when I see the Executive debating how to respond to the crisis that envelopes us all,

I hope that the evidence of progress is on the page in front of us. I hope that the first steps towards real justice, truth, a new beginning and the respect of children starts here this evening with this debate.

Mr O’Loan: The Minister referred to me earlier as a “Jeremiah”, because I was using the word “pessimistic” about our future. I can assure him that no one will be more pleased than I if I am confounded in the words that I have used. Nonetheless, the warning that I am issuing about how we do our business in our politics here in the Assembly should be taken seriously. I hope that I am wrong in what I said.

The Department of Justice will have a wide range of responsibilities. Indeed, the previous Member to speak referred to the huge budget for that Department, and that budget in itself tells us something about the scale of the responsibilities that a Department of Justice will have. As was said earlier, the money that is involved in that specific area is not the only issue; those powers have enormous social implications across a wide range of areas. The proper discharge of those functions will be vital.

I hope that Members will be very conscious of that point when we come to appoint a Minister. We need to appoint a Minister who will be competent to do the job and do it well. That appointment needs to be above petty political dealing. We should appoint a Minister who has proven competence to perform the task.

Mr Deputy Speaker, you will be glad to hear that I want to address only one of the responsibilities of the Department of Justice. That said, it is an important responsibility: the Northern Ireland Prison Service. Alban Maginness made some specific reference to it, and I want to say a little bit more. I particularly want to refer to the situation in Maghaberry prison, which I think should be one of the dominant priorities of the new Department and Minister.

I will begin by referring to a report that the Prisoner Ombudsman issued in January 2009 into the death by suicide of a prisoner, Colin Bell. That death occurred on 1 August 2008. One could go to earlier reports on Maghaberry prison, but I will start at that point. That prisoner was on suicide watch and was supposed to be monitored every 15 minutes, but video camera footage that was examined as part of the investigation showed that prison staff were lying in their beds watching television while they were

supposed to be on duty. Colin Bell took his own life, and his body lay in the cell for almost 40 minutes before it was discovered. The Prisoner Ombudsman made some 44 recommendations in that report.

I note that, at the time that that report was issued, the director of the Northern Ireland Prison Service, Mr Robin Masefield, said that he had:

"confidence in the job being done at the moment in taking Maghaberry forward"

by the governor and deputy governor at the jail. I note that that was in January 2009, and I will refer to that point again.

In July 2009, HM Chief Inspector of Prisons and the Chief Inspector of Criminal Justice in Northern Ireland jointly issued a major report.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Will the Member please relate his comments to the Budget? We are debating the Budget.

Mr O'Loan: We are, and I am saying that, when the new Department and Minister sit down on their first day in office and when they discuss how they expend their resources, this issue should be at the top of their agenda. It is a fundamental matter for that Department to address, because it has remained unaddressed and unresolved. That is a scandal in our society. For that reason, I want to refer to the matter a little bit more.

The report that I am referring to discussed the four criteria of a healthy prison, and it tested Maghaberry against those. Those criteria are: respect; resettlement; purposeful activity; and safety. It found that Maghaberry was not performing sufficiently well in the respect and resettlement criteria and that it was performing poorly in the purposeful activity and safety criteria. It was one of only three of the 169 establishments to have been inspected by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons since April 2005 to receive such an assessment. The scale of how awful the situation is has not yet fully come home to society. The report made 200 recommendations, 11 of which are core recommendations. It also pointed out that 54 of the recommendations of a previous report were not carried out in a way that achieved real change.

Mr Deputy Speaker, you asked me to relate my comments to the Budget. Every prisoner place costs us £81,500 a year. That is one of

the most expensive prison regimes in the UK, yet total failure comes out of that expenditure. The report stated that the current position at Maghaberry cannot continue. HM Chief Inspector of Prisons made his comments in January 2009, and the inspection occurred in the same month. The report was published in July 2009. That puts serious question marks not only on the immediate management of the prison but on the entire management of the Northern Ireland Prison Service.

My third reference is to the resignation of the governor of Maghaberry, Mr Steve Rodford, in December 2009, after only five months in office. Mr Rodford's home address and car registration details were found in the cell of a dissident republican inmate at the jail. The BBC's home affairs correspondent, Mr Kearney, reported that Mr Rodford's decision to step down was not connected only to that security threat. Mr Kearney said that suggestions had been made that Mr Rodford felt that he was unable to implement the changes that he believed were necessary to reform the regime at the jail.

He referred, as I have done, to a series of damning reports about the prison, which has been labelled as one of the worst and most expensive. Mr Kearney's understanding was that Mr Rodford quickly became disillusioned with the amount of bureaucracy and red tape in the system and felt that he was not being given the support and operational independence that he believed that he had been promised when he accepted the job.

That must be a priority area of action for the new Department and Minister on their first day. The culture in that prison, the culture of the prison officer system and the culture of management at the highest level of the Prison Service must change. The resources of the new Department must be brought to bear on that.

Mr Attwood: The Finance Minister listened attentively to today's earlier debate, but he had only 20 minutes to reply. Given that he spent so much time commenting on the Ulster Unionist Party's position, he was frustrated and exasperated that he did not have an opportunity to comment on some of the points that the SDLP raised. We raised particular points on the Supply resolution and the Budget (No. 2) Bill, so I invite the Minister, who is not restricted by time, to comment specifically on some of the

matters that arise from the Budget (No. 2) Bill and which are relevant.

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

A number of Members, primarily those from the SDLP, commented on what should happen to high-priority capital projects in the area of policing and justice. Questions have been put to the Minister about the police college and, from Mr O'Loan, about a future prison and the management of the Prison Service. After all the time that has been spent in reaching the point of devolving policing and justice powers and after all the delay, doubt and toing and froing, the public in the North will soon be asking some hard questions on the nature and character of the devolution of justice.

5.15 pm

One of those hard questions is: how much of the budget will be spent on capital items? As there are 20 days until the devolution of justice and six weeks until the Policing Board lodges an application for a new police college near Cookstown, the Minister should tell the Assembly and the wider public how the Executive will make decisions on what he referred to this morning as the context of strategic priorities. What mechanism will the Minister, DFP and the Executive employ to make those decisions, which are coming hard and fast, and which are crucial for confidence in policing and prisons, never mind all the other capital projects. Decisions may have to be made within six weeks; and, this afternoon, the Minister should be creating certainty and avoiding doubt about the mechanism for spending capital moneys on strategic priorities. In the SDLP's view, the two main priorities should be the new prison and the new police college. We should have an answer to those questions.

This morning, the Minister suggested that the money for the devolution of policing and justice should be ring-fenced for ever. I think that he used the words "for ever". All that the Assembly and Executive Review Committee said in its report, which was endorsed unanimously by the Assembly two weeks ago, was that the budget should be ring-fenced for 2010-11 only.

I think that we deserve to hear an answer from the Minister on that issue. I am sure that he has an opinion on it. He is surely not still making his mind up on that matter when there

are only 20 days until the devolution of justice. We want to know his opinion on whether the budget should be ring-fenced for one year only and on how decisions about capital projects, particularly the police college and the new prison, will be made in the short term. Given that the Minister did not have the opportunity or the time to answer those questions during this morning's debate, I am sure that he will take the opportunity to do so directly this afternoon.

I wish to emphasise one or two points about the prisons before I move to the substance of my speech. The prison budget is £160 million. My colleagues and other Members of the Assembly have already said that it costs a lot more per annum to house a prisoner in the North than it does in Britain. In fact, it costs £50,000 a prisoner per annum in Britain and £80,000 a prisoner per annum in the North. Therefore, if we spent the amount that is spent on prisoners per annum in Britain, we would save — this is a rough estimate and, therefore, subject to caution — between £40 million and £50 million per annum on the prison budget. Mr Farry's assessment of the situation was even more dramatic than that. This is not small change; we are talking about highly significant sums of money. Therefore, the Minister needs to face up to the issues regarding the £160 million that is being devolved and the cost of prisoners per annum in the North. I am interested to know what the note that the Minister has just been handed will reveal in that regard.

The following questions arise from that point. Given that we may face harsh financial circumstances in the very near future and given that the Minister will have the whip hand when it comes to negotiating with Departments, including the devolved Department with responsibility for policing and justice and given that, in our view, tough negotiations with the Justice Department may begin in the 2011-12 financial year, does the Minister believe that there is a disproportionate cost per prison per annum? If he does not believe that, and if there is no consensus, we are going nowhere when it comes to the cost of prisons in the North.

Does the Finance Minister believe that the Prison Officers Association (POA) should continue to have direct negotiating rights around, for example, pay and conditions, which make up a very substantial part of the £160 million prison budget? It is the SDLP's view that the POA enjoys excessive powers in the running,

management and general conduct of prisons in the North. Does the Minister believe that it should continue to have direct negotiating powers with the Government over its members' terms and conditions of employment? The SDLP does not believe that. We believe that the POA should be recognised as a trade association or union along with any other, but that it should not have such an exaggerated or extravagant role. I say that, mindful that the Prison Officers Association and its members suffered gravely over the years of conflict and that that should never have arisen. I recognise that there are issues around that and it is something that the Minister needs to think about. It is an issue involving £160 million. It concerns how government is conducted and whether one body should have disproportionate powers over and above any other trade union or representative association when it comes to how money is spent.

A number of Members rightly raised the issue of legal aid and legal services. As Chairperson of the Assembly and Executive Review Committee, Mr Spratt will be aware that, last week, the Committee was given advice on the current situation around legal aid. The relevance of that advice will become very clear. The Minister is fully aware that under the Gordon Brown offer for the funding of the devolution of policing and justice, which has been taken up, commitments were made, including a commitment concerning legal aid pressures and shortfalls.

In a very curious speech this morning, Mr Ford was not at all enthusiastic about the Brown offer and flagged up all sorts of political and budgetary pressures that the Justice Ministry may face. Time will tell whether that was self-serving on his part. I will read what officials from the Court Service advise on that matter:

"Under the devolution funding package announced by the Prime Minister in October 2009, the resource budget for the NILSC was set at £85 million until 2012/13, after which the budget will reduce to £79 million from 2013/14."

Remember, this package is from the much advertised and promoted Gordon Brown letter, and its consequences are coming home to roost. Nonetheless, we have to live with the consequences. The Legal Services Commission said:

"In addition, further access to the contingency fund of up to £39 million was made available

until 2010/11 to meet legal aid and other court pressures."

It adds:

"Of this additional £39 million, £17 million was used in 2009/10 and the greater part of the balance of £22 million is expected to be required to meet legal aid funding pressures in 2010/11."

The consequence of Gordon Brown's letter is that the extra £39 million will be gone by 2010-11. Thereafter, there will be further budgetary pressures, which the Legal Services Commission has identified as £4.8 million in 2011-12, £4.06 million in 2012-13, and almost £9 million in 2013-14. That is a total of £18 million in budgetary pressures in the three years after the Gordon Brown money runs out. The issue for the Assembly when discussing the devolution of justice and the budget for it is that, even if there was a zero budget for legal aid over the next three or four years, the Legal Services Commission has identified an £18 million shortfall. The Gordon Brown money is gone, and £18 million more is required. That money is needed because legal aid is not ad hoc or discretionary but is a legally binding contractual obligation between the state and those who provide legal services to the state through the legal profession.

Mr Spratt: I will re-emphasise a point that I made earlier: the Member will be aware that officials told the Assembly and Executive Review Committee that legal aid was two or three times more expensive in Northern Ireland than in other parts of the United Kingdom. Does he accept that some work could be done to save substantial sums of money in the legal aid budget?

Mr Attwood: I thank the Member for his intervention and I agree with him, but that view is contradicted by the Legal Services Commission. In its letter to the Committee, it compared the average spend on legal aid per head of population in Northern Ireland to that in England and Wales, and although it is a little more expensive here, it is nowhere near three times as expensive. I am on Mr Spratt's side, but there is contrary evidence to that which he introduced, which, on balance, I agree with. Whether or not that is the case, there is an immediate budgetary pressure of £18 million over three years on the legal services budget alone, and that is assuming that it does not get any worse. Indeed, depending on how quickly the Legal Services Commission processes

applications for the payment of legal aid, that pressure could become more acute.

To be fair to it, in its letter to the Committee, the commission went on to outline a lot of areas in which it could try to save money or cut costs. Mr Ford indicated that, when he takes office, he will have to address that pressure very quickly, and he is correct. However, there is a curious comment in paragraph 18 of the letter that the Legal Services Commission sent to the Committee last week, which states:

“Some of the reform programme can be implemented either administratively or through secondary legislation.”

The commission went on to add:

“Other reforms will require primary legislation, and draft legislation is being prepared for this purpose for inclusion in any Criminal Justice Bill which the Minister for Justice is minded to introduce into the Assembly.”

I have a great deal of time for many of those in the leadership of the Legal Services Commission and the Court Service, and I can think of one or two people who could have informed that thinking. However, when a body in the North is writing to the Assembly to make those points before the devolution of policing and justice has occurred, it is getting a little ahead of itself. It is a slightly imbalanced approach, but that is more of a political point.

Mr A Maginness: It is slightly previous.

Mr Attwood: Indeed, as my colleague said, it is “slightly previous.”

There are two substantive matters that I wish to discuss shortly. However, before I do, I want to mention, as Mr Farry did earlier, that there is no budget line for the Historical Enquiries Team after 2010, and that will fall under the responsibility of the PSNI and the Policing Board, of which I declare an interest as a member. We must address that matter, and I hope that that can be done properly and that the Historical Enquiries Team is not short-changed.

However, that issue becomes germane to the devolved institutions when justice powers are devolved, because the Commission for Victims and Survivors has a statutory duty to keep under review the arrangements for the needs of victims and survivors. In today’s Budget, £13·7 million has been allocated to the Commission for Victims and Survivors so that it can fulfil its

statutory functions, which include keeping those arrangements under review.

5.30 pm

It would be legitimate to ask in here what is happening on the HET side. We must not compromise the lines of demarcation between the HET, the Policing Board, the PSNI and the Assembly. Nonetheless, that is an issue that I want to flag up.

There are two substantive matters that I want to deal with. First, my colleague Mr Maginness spoke at length about the Public Prosecution Service. As he said, its budget line in today’s Budget is nearly £38 million. The SDLP’s view is that in too many areas, that money is not being spent as efficiently and effectively as it could be. The Assembly needs to act promptly to deal with the issues in the Public Prosecution Service.

There were 15 recommendations in the Hillsborough arrangements that dealt with what a Minister of Justice and a Department of Justice could do, and I stress the words “could do”. There was no commitment from those who signed off on the Hillsborough Agreement — namely the DUP and Sinn Féin — to what they would do or what they thought that the Minister of Justice should try to incorporate into a Programme for Government addendum. Reference was made only to what could be done. Of those 15 areas, seven were related to the management of offenders, other ways to deal with offending and the Prison Service, and two or three of them dealt with the Public Prosecution Service. That 10 or 11 of the 15 matters that a Minister of Justice could deal with concern prisons and the Public Prosecution Service indicates where a lot of the attention needs to go.

It will be worth looking at whether the £37·4 million allocated to the Public Prosecution Service is spent in the way that it should be, whether the governance and management of the Public Prosecution Service is all fit for purpose and whether there is a need for better systems to ensure that that money is maximised to the benefit of the Public Prosecution Service and the people whom it serves, namely the victims of crime and their families.

It is constructive to go back to what an independent body said in the summer of 2009 on the management of the Public Prosecution

Service. The Criminal Justice Inspection's 2009 report, 'The Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland: A Follow-Up Inspection of the 2007 Baseline Inspection Report Recommendations' states:

"There was scope, however, for considerably more progress in relation to the implementation of the recommendations relating to the management challenges facing the PPS."

One must remember that the Criminal Justice Inspection (CJI) will inspect how the PPS spends the £37.4 million allocated to it in today's Budget. The report continued:

"Of the seven major recommendations made in the 2007 baseline inspection, which relate to the management of the organisation, there was only one in which substantial progress had been made – that a decision should be taken on the PPS as a department in its own right with responsibility for its own budget. Only some progress has been made in relation to the development of case management, effective organisational structures and improved performance management."

The report went further and said:

"there remains resistance from prosecutors to providing more detailed reasons for decisions."

When one considers the experiences of the families of Harry Holland, Thomas Devlin and Gerard Devlin from Ballymurphy and all their comments over the past 18 months and the past number of days on how the PPS conducts its affairs, how it treats victims and survivors and how it fails to disclose to families what it should be reasonably expected to, the Assembly should, as a matter of priority and through the Minister of Justice, look at how the £37.4 million is spent and how the PPS is working through the independent oversight recommendations of the CJI.

There must be a compelling understanding of what is needed in respect of the PPS. An independent oversight body is so much on the same page as so many families who have had such bad experiences at the hands of the PPS. There must be a compelling argument to spend the sum of almost £38 million in a way that brings about the changes that the CJI and the families jointly and equally demand.

I welcome the fact that, for what it is worth, that matter was flagged up in very graphic terms in the Hillsborough agreement, which states, at length, the need to develop a:

"Victims Code of Practice setting out a minimum standard of service that criminal justice agencies will be expected to provide to victims of crime".

It continues:

"It is envisaged that there would be a presumption of full and frank disclosure of information by the PPS to a Victim under the Code except where to do so would prejudice the administration of justice".

Those matters are self-evident. The evidence is there, as is the public experience. There should be no argument against pushing on with that sort of reform programme. In that way, we will be able to stand over the spending of £37.4 million in a much more significant and considered manner.

The budget line for policing is approximately £850 million. That will pass over on the devolution of policing and justice powers. As my colleague Mr McDevitt said in the context of a different matter, for the size of the budget for the devolution of policing and justice and the £850 million that we will allocate to policing through the Budget (No.2) Bill, one would expect answers to questions that our constituents and parties will raise in the next months and years. Despite all that money and the access to information that it should bring, a huge and growing gap remains in the devolved justice arrangements.

It is the view of the SDLP that that huge and growing gap was flagged up dramatically last week in the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee's report into the Omagh bombing. As we speak, the NIO has responsibility for policing and justice matters. It has been responsible for that in real time in a real world over the past number of years. Although issues such as the role of MI5 and of SOCA in the North and the PPS's collapsing of cases on the basis of public interest are being dealt down the road by Ministers and officials, they will not be dealt up the road in 20 days' time when the entire policing and justice budget is devolved. At that time, we will have responsibility for a £850 million policing budget but, on the basis of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee's report, no power, input, standing or authority on those matters.

Therefore, even at this late stage, the SDLP is saying that, for all the moneys that will come across and for all the authority that will fall to the Assembly because of that money and

because of the transfer of functions, there remain serious and grave matters that are not within our responsibility and for which we are not accountable. Therefore, that money being devolved achieves nothing. Last week, in reference to parliamentarians being denied sight of the full Kelly report into the Omagh bombing, which was the single biggest terror atrocity during the years of conflict, the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee said that it is:

“thoroughly reprehensible that the government should seek to prevent the parliamentary committee charged with oversight of the affairs of Northern Ireland such access”.

What did the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee’s report say about the terms of reference of the British Government-commissioned report on the Omagh bombing and about the bombing itself? It stated:

“the broader question of whether it could have been prevented by taking action against the gang believed to be carrying out bombings from mid-1997 onwards is one that remains to be addressed. The narrow terms of Sir Peter Gibson’s inquiry have left that question unanswered.”

What did the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee’s report say about critical questions in respect of which no answers were forthcoming? It stated:

“we can only pose questions: whether Special Branch requested ‘live’ monitoring of any phone used during the Omagh bombing; whether GCHQ monitored one or more phones in real time; whether intelligence relating to such phones was obtained by GCHQ on 15 August 1998; and when such intelligence reached Special Branch in Northern Ireland. We would like answers to these questions.”

Those are the questions that are going to arise, one way or the other — hopefully not in such tragic circumstances — in the months and years following the devolution of policing and justice powers and the passage of the Budget (No. 2) Bill tomorrow. Despite the devolution of justice and the moneys involved that will go to the policing side, we will not be able to ask those questions in this Chamber while the parliamentarians in Westminster, when they try to ask them, are still denied access to relevant information in order to provide the truth of what happened to the families concerned and the certainty that something similar could not happen in the future.

We welcome the Budget (No. 2) Bill, despite the issues that we have, quite rightly, flagged up. It is curious that the SDLP is the only party to flag up those issues. The nature and character of the devolution of justice must be a step change from the nature and character of devolution over the past three years. The issues that the SDLP has flagged up, whether on national security, legal aid funding, the capacity and effectiveness of the PPS, or the issues that Mr McDevitt raised in relation to an abuse inquiry, are the issues of quality that will define the nature of devolution of justice. We trust that it will be different from the nature of devolution over the past three years.

Mrs D Kelly: As the former chair of the Northern Ireland Policing Board’s resources and improvement committee, I am well aware of the challenges that face the policing budget. However, in the negotiations with the NIO, I was always aware that the policing budget would be used as a bargaining chip to get the DUP over the line on a date for the devolution of policing and justice powers. That is where we are today. The much heralded budget that is before us, with the additional moneys that were promised to us by the NIO and the Treasury, was something of a bribe to get others over the line, rather than just being the right thing to do.

A number of Members talked about the cost of incarceration in the North, which amounts to £80,000 per prisoner. Many other Members mentioned the need to tackle crime among young people, and youth justice in particular. They also talked about the failings of the young offenders’ centres. There is a real need for the Assembly and the Executive to agree some basic values and principles, because they have a direct impact on the policing and justice budget. One of those is the criminal age of responsibility in the North. In Britain at present, a young person of 10 years of age is deemed to be criminally responsible — one of the lowest such ages across Western democracies. That is something that I want changed. The people who took part in the Bill of Rights Forum recommended that the age of criminal responsibility be raised, and I hope that the Minister of Finance and Personnel will see the benefits of investing in services to prevent crime and of investing in our young people. The raising of the age of criminal responsibility will have the direct effect of reducing the cost of prisons, because we will not put so many young people behind bars.

5.45 pm

In Scotland, youth justice is a matter for the Minister for Public Health and Sport. I have mentioned to the Health Committee that Assembly research into that particular arrangement should be commissioned in order to establish the benefits. The Finance Minister may be interested in such research to see whether the outcomes are better, not just for young people but for society as a whole.

Dr Farry: Will the Member reflect on the fact that there is currently no one under the age of 14 in detention in the juvenile justice centre, nor has there been for quite some time? Her point about any potential savings being made from raising the age of criminal responsibility is a moot one. The system is loathe to send anyone under that age into detention.

Mrs D Kelly: I welcome the Member's intervention. Nonetheless, his point argues more for raising the age of criminal responsibility. If the process is not being used, why keep it? There is nothing to say that the courts may not take a different stance tomorrow. It is interesting that the Member seems to think that it is worth keeping on the statute books the ability to lock up children as young as 10 rather than tackle some of the key causes of crime, such as poverty, social exclusion and disadvantage. However, tackling those issues was not something that the Alliance Party cited as a price for the devolution of policing and justice and the appointment of the Justice Minister.

Dr Farry: Will the Member give way?

Mrs D Kelly: No; I will not give way again.

The other issues that I wanted to touch on relate to the police estate. There are a number of proposals regarding police stations, and I noted that Peter Weir made a comment about the police estate on yesterday's 'Politics Show'. The Budget (No. 2) Bill also contains a promise from the British Treasury of additional funding to tackle hearing-loss claims, for example, based on the sale of former military sites. What is the fallback position if land and property prices remain suppressed in the foreseeable future? What will be the outcome, or what is plan B, if that money is not available from the British Treasury or if the prices are not realised?

There is also the question of equal pay claims in relation to non-police staff. That is also

contained in the report of the Assembly and Executive Review Committee, and I wonder how that will be costed in the Budget. Like other Members of the House, I have received queries from members of staff who are civil servants but who have moved across to the Police Service as non-police staff. They will not be entitled to the equal pay back pay as currently negotiated. That will call for the attention of any new Justice Minister fairly immediately. Perhaps the Finance Minister will inform us how that will be taken forward.

On the issue of payments, I learned, as a member of the Policing Board, that the NIO is responsible for the budget line of payments to agents of the police. I am not sure whether payment for the MI5 agents will come from the police budget, or whether that will come out of MI5's budget. Perhaps the Minister will tell us how much of the budget line is for payment of agents of the Police Service.

There are many issues relating to the rehabilitation of offenders, which others have remarked upon. There is a need to resettle and rehabilitate offenders properly. Mr O'Loan spoke eloquently about the pressing need to follow through on the Prisoner Ombudsman's recommendations and on the Criminal Justice Inspection's report on our prisons. Many civilised nations and commentators judge a society by how it treats its prisoners. We all know that many of our jails are full of people who should be receiving treatment for alcohol or drug misuse.

While talking about the needs of offenders, it would be remiss of us not to talk about the needs of victims. The devolution of policing and justice powers carries high expectations across all our communities and, particularly, those that are under siege from criminality and antisocial behaviour. The Serious Organised Crime Agency will remain at Westminster. Will the Minister inform the House how the money will be divvied up?

Will all the money from the assets that are seized from criminal overlords go into the coffers of the devolution of policing and justice budget, or will some of that money remain at Westminster? Will the Executive live up to Paul Goggins's recent promises about moneys being realised through criminal assets? Will some of that be shared with communities so that people will see that crime does not pay? Criminals should have their assets seized, and the communities that suffered at the hands of those criminals should

see a material benefit from that. Those are important points that are of considerable public interest.

Mr Attwood spoke about the budget of the Historical Enquiries Team. Dealing with the past is emotive, and the House has wrestled with the issue for some time. We need to address it seriously, and the promises that have been made must be kept. Some people have reservations about the work of the Historical Enquiries Team, but, by and large, the evidence from victims' families who got results indicates that they are more pleased with its findings than some would have us believe. Some victims' families have at least received answers to long-standing questions about what happened to their loved ones, what were their last words, and so on. By and large, those victims' families know that they will not see justice served. However, they want to know the truth.

It will be interesting to hear from the Minister about the Historical Enquiries Team and, indeed, the Police Ombudsman and how that office will be financed and budgeted. Two or three years ago, the Police Ombudsman submitted a business case to the NIO for an additional £3 million to investigate some historical cases. I know, having spoken to the Police Ombudsman, that, with the current resources, it will take some 20 years to investigate all the murders that have been reported to it.

If we are to move on as a society and a reconciled people, we must deal adequately with our past and learn lessons from it. Mr Attwood covered the issue of shared intelligence quite well. The Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, in detailing its findings on the Omagh bomb, was more eloquent than I could be about the pitfalls and dangers of not having proper oversight of MI5 and its agents in the North.

As Members know, the SDLP has worked hard for many years on the reform of the Police Service. This afternoon, we have not been found wanting in pointing out the need for reform of the justice system. We must get that right for the people of the North.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I thought that the debate would have finished a long time ago. However, the SDLP, which is probably a bit miffed at not getting the Justice Ministry, has indulged itself and given its views on every aspect of policing. With the indulgence

of the Deputy Speakers, we have had a wide-ranging debate.

Every kind of SDLP prejudice on policing has been given an airing today, including those on the following: the Prison Service, MI5, SOCA, the Equality Commission and the Human Rights Commission. I wondered when they would get to the point of beating up Special Branch, but Alex Attwood did not let us down on that point. I thought that, as he wound down towards the end of his speech, he was going to miss the opportunity, but he did not, and so we have had a very wide-ranging debate on the various Budget issues.

Most of the comments may be characterised as advice on how the Budget should be spent in future and the priorities that people want for future spending. That is one of the benefits of devolution. The discussion is maybe not totally relevant to this debate: we are simply discussing the Budget as handed down. However, it has been useful in highlighting the benefits of devolution.

I do not agree with all the priorities that Members have specified. At one stage, the SDLP named six top priorities for spending the money. I will come to those in a minute or two. Those cannot all be top priorities; but the debate has been useful in that it gives Members the opportunity to highlight what they perceive to be important aspects of where the policing budget should be spent, the issues that exist and how local decisions should be made. It emphasises the importance of what the Assembly has agreed: namely, that policing and justice should be devolved, and that we should have our own fingerprints on how resources should be used on the kinds of issues that the Justice Minister should address.

Having listened to the SDLP, I pity the Justice Minister. He will get a knock on his door every day, and he will perhaps wish he had never taken on the job, as an endless stream of SDLP Members arrive to tell him their top priority for the day, even if it is always different to the previous day's priority.

I come to the issues that Members raised during the debate. I take them in no particular order, because, while listening to Members, I have shuffled my papers and I am not sure where they are all are.

The first issue raised by the Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel was whether the Executive will look across all their programmes when deciding how to allocate funding in line with priorities. As I made clear this morning, there is a case for ring-fencing the policing budget, at least in the first year. To a certain extent, spending plans have been decided, and Ministers have given an indication as to how money should be spent. Nevertheless, we will move quickly to examine our priorities and to decide how the policing budget fits into them. That answers one of the questions Mr Attwood raised.

The one thing I can say, despite some of the doubts that Members raised, is that we are in a better position to do that, having secured the financial settlement. That means that there is a sound financial foundation for the devolution of the functions and it ensures that the kinds of issues that have been raised do not have an impact on other spending areas. As we move forward, there will be pressures of all kinds. Policing is like any other area of the Budget. There will always be new things that people want to spend money on, which will present challenges. There was a huge wish list from the SDLP in particular. I will address some of the items as I go on.

I noticed that although the SDLP wanted money spent on a whole range of things, the only saving was suggested by Mr Attwood, when he indulged himself in one of his favourite prejudices, namely the Prison Service.

He said that perhaps £40 million could be saved if costs were brought down to the equivalent of the rest of the United Kingdom. When it was pointed out to him that the legal aid budget here was much higher than other parts of the United Kingdom, he was not as quick to say that we, too, should reduce the legal aid budget to the same level as other parts of the United Kingdom. I may return to that point.

6.00 pm

Simon Hamilton asked about the financial performance of the Northern Ireland Office and the Public Prosecution Service, and whether they had the same rigour and management of spending as the Assembly, where 99.7% of departmental budgets were spent in the last financial year. I cannot answer that today. However, the Assembly, the Executive and the

Department of Finance and Personnel will expect the same rigour to be applied to the Justice Department as to other Departments. I have told the House many times that if Departments are spending to their budgets, they are spending in line with the priorities that were set down when the Assembly agreed the Programme for Government.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel and Mr Hamilton raised the question of underspends; we want to ensure that the new Department spends to its budget and that we do not have substantial underspends. If the Members who spoke this afternoon have their way, there should not be too much difficulty in making sure that all the money is spent. Mr Hamilton also raised the issue of sufficient resources. There will always be calls from Ministers for more resources for taking on new responsibility. That adds another factor into the assessment and recommendations that must be made in the future. However, the financial package, which was negotiated during a downturn, goes a considerable way to assist us in that work.

Mr Basil McCrea said that his party was now content that we get to grips with the challenges and that he wanted to see real consensus and working together, which relates to a point that Mr Attwood made. We will soon get a test of Mr McCrea's desire to see real consensus working in the Executive, because one of the big issues that Mr Attwood and other Members raised will be the police college, which we will have to resolve quickly because we are up against a timetable.

If the police college is to go ahead, there will be significant input from the Health Minister to ensure that the Fire and Rescue Service can move to the police college. That is not just a case of saying that we can bolt on the Fire and Rescue Service at some later date, because much of the necessary infrastructure will require that commitment from the Health Department at the early stage. I hope, therefore, that Mr McCrea has not put the Health Minister in the hot seat by giving a commitment that his party wants to see consensus working in the Executive on those issues, because the first test will be how we deal with the police college and the Health Department's input and role in that.

Mr McCrea asked about the mechanism. I made some enquiries, and, as far as I understand, the

business case is coming to its final stages in the Northern Ireland Office. The business case for the Fire and Rescue Service aspect is still being dealt with by the Health Department. I hope that those two things will come together fairly quickly. The business case must then be signed off by DFP, after which there will have to be a commitment from the various Ministers to make money available for the police college. Mr Attwood mentioned other capital projects, which will simply go in with all the other capital projects for the Executive to prioritise and push through.

I think that Mr Maginness wanted to rewrite the budget. He had a whole list of things. He said that it was a good day; he was quite right, and I emphasise that. Now we must have leadership on all the issues that he raised. He said that the budget must be well spent, and he raised issues about the justice system being more sensitive to victims; the cost of keeping prisoners, which seems to be a favourite theme; young offenders; the need for a new prison; and not just doing things the old way. When it comes to building new prisons, which may well become an issue, I will be interested to hear whether Mr Maginness thinks that we should move away from the traditional role of the Justice Department and the Prison Service and look at some sort of private initiative. In other parts of the United Kingdom, opportunities have emerged not just in prison design but in their operation, and some private companies have been successful in rehabilitating prisoners. It is something that we will have the opportunity to debate in the Assembly, and it is something which the Justice Minister will have to look at.

Mr Maginness also talked about the PPS and the Law Commission, about which he made a relevant point. On Friday, I had a long session with the Law Commission, and we looked at how it will approach its work for the Assembly on managing shared spaces in apartment developments etc. Initially, the issue appears to be very simple, but when one gets down to it, it is fairly complicated. Lawyers always make things complicated, do they not, Mr Deputy Speaker? Nevertheless, things become much more complicated than they appear at first sight. Having that kind of input from people with the professional capacity to deal with the issues is something that Departments will want to make more use of in the future, and, based on our conversation, the commission seems to have a good approach. We need to be careful

not to duplicate work. For example, we do not want one body doing research and consulting on changes that might be required in the law and Departments feeling that they have to do the same. To avoid unnecessary expenditure, we must ensure that that does not happen.

Mr Maginness also raised the issue of legal aid. He wanted more money for the Human Rights Commission, the Equality Commission — two of my favourite targets, so maybe it is just as well that I will not be in charge of allocating that money — the Civic Forum, CAB and a range of other bodies.

Mr A Maginness: Will the Member give way?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I will give way in a minute. Looking at the usual wish list, as I have said in other Budget debates, it is one thing to say that one wants money to be spent in a certain way, but, especially when resources are finite, it is another to say where one will save the money that one wishes to be reallocated.

Mr A Maginness: Schedule 2 refers to the Civic Forum in relation to the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister. Will the Minister clarify how much money has been allocated to the Civic Forum? If money has not been allocated, what is the purpose of the Civic Forum being mentioned in schedule 1?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I cannot give the Member an answer, but I may get that answer handed to me very soon. If I receive it before the end of my speech, I will come back to the Member.

The Member also raised the —

Lord Morrow: The answer is circled.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The amount of money that has been allocated to the Civic Forum is £316,000, and I am sure that we could find lots of different, much more productive ways to spend £316,000. That is one of the issues that the Justice Minister will want to look at in the future.

Mr Maginness also raised the issue of legal aid reform, as did Mr Attwood. First, additional money has been received for legal aid. Mr Attwood is right to say that there are still pressures. With any demand-led budget such as that, there may well be pressures. However, at least we know why that additional money

was required. We know that there was, and is, a disparity in legal aid expenditure between Northern Ireland and other parts of the United Kingdom. Redressing that requires reform and finding efficiencies. A start has been made on introducing some of those reforms. In September 2009, criminal cases in Magistrates' Courts were put on a standard fee system, and remuneration arrangements are to be put in place for the high-cost Crown Court cases.

There are still efficiencies that have to be made. Importantly, the Prime Minister's package has given us the flexibility to introduce those reforms without impinging on other parts of the Budget. That does not mean that we can sit back with the attitude that because that money is there, no changes are required. That money simply gives us the ability to work our way through the required changes. Mr Maginness said that it was important to have a legal profession that is independent and, therefore, properly funded. Equally, with so many other Budget priorities, it is important that we do not have a system that is simply designed to make the legal profession rich. That is why, despite the extra money, there will be a requirement to address that issue.

I come now to Mr Farry, who raised the fact that in Northern Ireland the cost per prisoner place was now £78,750. That is a reduction from £90,000 at the beginning of the devolution period in 2006-07. Nevertheless, it is much more expensive than in other parts of the United Kingdom. There are lots of reasons for that difference, but we do not simply accept that there is nothing much to be done. If savings can be made, the Assembly will have to look at them. I understand that it comes down to things like prison design, which determines how many prison officers are required to look after a particular wing, and Mr Attwood's point about staffing and payment practices. I imagine that that will be a huge challenge involving no easy decisions.

6.15 pm

Mr Farry said that the status quo was not sustainable, and I welcome his suggestions on options for savings. That was a welcome development because some of the other speeches were all about more funding for this and that. I have said time and again that Mr Farry is always very happy to stick his head above the parapet. After 12 April, it may be a

case of lifting Mr Ford's head above the parapet. I wonder whether he will be quite as happy for Mr Farry to do that for him.

Mr Farry made an important point about cross-departmental thinking. In response to Mr Attwood's point, ring-fencing the policing and justice budget cannot go on for ever because the kind of cross-departmental thinking to which Mr Farry referred would not occur. He gave some excellent examples of where such thinking may help to save money, reduce policing costs and provide better outcomes. That is important. It is not just a case of whether we can reduce costs; it is about whether we can get a better result by spending money in different ways.

I think that Dolores Kelly said that early intervention could prevent people from getting into a cycle of crime; she said that money could be directed to that area rather than into building prison cells to put them in once they are in that cycle. The status quo is not sustainable. Even if it were, perhaps we need to challenge some of the ways in which money is spent to achieve better outcomes.

Dr Farry: Does the Minister think that there is a danger that he could be coming across as a bit of a liberal?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: That is the ultimate insult. I am no liberal when it comes to ensuring that those who do wrong do not escape the consequences of their actions. However, if there are ways of preventing them from doing wrong in the first place, that is the right way to go.

Mr McGlone raised the issue of Desertcreat, which is a constituency interest of his. I have already talked about that issue and do not want to dwell on it, but I hope that I have at least explained where we are. The decision by the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety is one of the important steps that need to be taken so that the project can proceed. I hope that members of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety will get that message to him. Since the Fire and Rescue Service, the police and others have to work closely together, having all training on one site creates immense benefits. Considerable running costs are attached to that large site, so having economies of scale that help to reduce those costs can only be of benefit in the running of the site.

Mr Gallagher raised the issue of illegal dumping. I was drifting off when he started talking about PPS, the sustainable development of the countryside and illegal dumping. I thought that we had moved on to another debate. I wondered whether he was on about planning policy statement 21 (PPS 21). The issue of illegal dumping has been dealt with by the Minister of the Environment. Indeed, I know something about that issue because it was resolved while I was Minister of the Environment. Mr Gallagher is right: the authorities in the Irish Republic have to deal with that problem because they did not keep an eye on what happened to rubbish when it was passed to contractors. They have accepted liability for the problem. I am not making a political point, but it would have been far better if it had not happened because it has left a scar on the countryside. About 20 sites in different parts of Northern Ireland will have to be cleared over the next 10 years.

I also note the points that Mr O'Loan made about Maghaberry prison. I am not going to comment on them at this point, because a lot of them are management matters, which the Justice Minister will have to deal with in the future.

Mr Attwood raised the issue of capital spend and what I meant by ring-fencing and whether ring-fencing would go on. I hope that I have answered that point for him sufficiently. To ever answer a point sufficiently for Mr Attwood is an achievement —

Mr Attwood: It is an achievement for you.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: It is an achievement for anybody. Nevertheless, I will make one point in response to a point that Mr Attwood raised. He had his usual dig at the Prison Officers' Association and its role in the cost of prisons. However, I wish to put on record that prison pay is determined by the Prison Service Pay Review Body. It makes recommendations to the Secretary of State, and he then decides whether to implement the recommendations. The review body has direct input from the Prison Officers' Association (POA), but there is also input from the Northern Ireland Prison Service and the Prison Governors Association. Therefore, Mr Attwood is wrong to give the impression that pay levels are decided by the very people who will benefit from them, and I want to put that straight.

Mr Attwood: A very senior person in the Prison Service once referred to the direct negotiating rights that the POA has with the Secretary of State. Whatever way you dress it up and whatever input there is from other individuals and groups, it has direct negotiating rights with the Secretary of State. I do not think that a trade union, whether it is the POA or any other, should have direct negotiating rights with a Minister for Justice in the event of the devolution of justice.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: Mr Attwood made an argument about the high cost of the Prison Service and the influence that the Prison Officers' Association has when it comes to pay negotiations, but exactly the same point could be made about the whole legal aid system, where there is considerable pressure by and ability for lawyers to determine what happens there. Therefore, if he wants to go after the Prison Service in the way that he does, he must accept that there is an equal argument when it comes to the whole area of legal aid.

Mr Attwood: I thank the Minister for giving way. I conceded that point when Mr Spratt intervened during my speech. I will repeat again that I agree with Mr Spratt that the fees that lawyers get in the North are disproportionate to the fees that lawyers get in Britain. However, the legal aid bill per capita in the North is not that disproportionate to the legal aid bill per capita in Britain. Therefore, the legal aid bill may well be the same regardless of whether or not the fees are reduced.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: There is some dispute about the difference. The Member quoted a report from the —

Mr Attwood: It was impartial.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I would hardly think that it might be regarded as an impartial report. The Prison Officers' Association gives me all kinds of reasons for the cost of prisons being legitimately much higher in Northern Ireland. If we are going to make those comparisons, at least let them be done by someone who is objective. He also mentioned the status of the PPS. A number of Members wrongly indicated that it was funded by my Department. It is not; it is funded by the Assembly when it votes through the resources, as it does for all Departments. The director will be answerable to the Assembly.

Mrs Bradley mentioned the funding of the youth justice system. The current spending plans for that area are £21.5 million, and any future change will be a matter for the new Justice Minister and the Executive. If we are going to release more funding for that area, we will have to take it from somewhere else. Some £316,000 has been allocated for the Civic Forum, and I think that OFMDFM officials are considering options for the way forward on the Civic Forum.

I think that it was Mrs Kelly who raised the incentivisation receipts from SOCA. The situation will remain as it is; the Public Prosecution Service is the approved recipient of the funds. Up until December 2009, we had received £1.6 million. The direction from the Home Office is that at least a proportion of those funds should be used to drive up performance on asset recovery and, where appropriate, to fund local crime-fighting priorities for the benefit of the community. That is a requirement from the Home Office, so there is an assurance that a proportion, but not all, of the funds will remain in Northern Ireland, and the criteria that were used in the past will apply to those funds.

Mr McDevitt raised an issue that I think we will live with for a long time, as more examples of child abuse, especially institutionalised child abuse, emerge. It is up to the Police Service to investigate those cases. Given that people have lived with the consequences of that abuse, some of them for long periods in their lives, many will want to see the police pursuing those cases, where possible. It is for the police to give those cases priority. When it comes to how the police will allocate the resources, I am not sure whether it will be a job for the Assembly or for the Justice Minister. However, any Chief Constable who is aware of the public outcry over the issues and who knows the views that I am sure are shared by Members across the Assembly would want to give some priority to the investigation of those cases. The PPS would also want to carry out prosecutions, regardless of how far back the case occurred, so long as there is sufficient evidence.

Mr McDevitt: There will, undoubtedly, be police investigations, but there is a strong possibility that there will also be processes of inquiry. Although all of us will want those processes of inquiry to be inexpensive in the sense that they do not become a charter for lawyers, they are likely to have an impact on the Budget that

we are voting on today. Members must bear in mind that the answer that we need to find on behalf of the survivors might not be found within the confines of a police investigation; the investigation might have to be broader.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I am not an expert on the various formats that inquiries of this nature may take. I listened to what has been said about the events in Londonderry and the inquiry there. Almost £200 million was spent, and people are still expressing their unhappiness. The Justice Minister and the Assembly will want to consider whether we can get answers to the hurt and suffering that people have gone through by simply putting in place structures that benefit only the lawyers who fight over the minutiae of the legal process.

Meanwhile, people who have suffered simply sit back in frustration with it all.

6.30 pm

I am not a fan of inquiries per se. My preference, and what the Assembly must do now, is to look at previous expensive inquiries that have not gone as expected and try to ensure that a mechanism is set that, at least, deals with people's hurt and, importantly, brings perpetrators to justice and makes them pay for their crimes.

In closing, I want to thank all Members who took part in the debate, which has been wide-ranging and shows the interest that there will be in the budget for policing and justice during the coming year as the Assembly seeks to shape it into a budget that is designed for Northern Ireland. I ask the House to support the Bill.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Before I put the Question, I remind Members that, as it is a Budget Bill, the motion requires cross-community support.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

That the Second Stage of the Budget (No. 2) Bill [NIA 11/09] be agreed.

Committee Business

Motions to Amend Standing Orders

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. As the next 17 motions relate to amendments to Standing Orders, I propose to conduct the debate as follows: I propose to group the motions and to conduct two debates. The first group includes the motions (a) to (p) as detailed on the Order Paper. I shall call the Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures to move motion (a). Debate will then take place on motions (a) to (p). When all Members who wish to speak have done so, I shall put the Question on motion (a). I shall then ask the Chairperson to move formally each of the remaining motions in the group in turn, and I will then put the Question on each motion, (b) to (p), without further debate.

I shall then ask the Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures to move motion (q). Debate will then take place on that motion. I will put the Question on that motion after the debate. If that is clear, we shall proceed.

The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Lord Morrow): I beg to move

(a) After Standing Order 49 insert —

“49A. ESTABLISHMENT OF COMMITTEE FOR JUSTICE

(1) *This order applies where, subsequent to all Ministerial offices being filled following the election of the Assembly, the office of Minister of Justice is established.*

(2) *All chairpersons and deputy chairpersons of statutory committees shall cease to hold their offices on those committees. All other members shall continue to hold their seats on those committees.*

(3) *The procedures set out in Standing Orders for —*

(a) *determining the number of statutory committees;*

(b) *establishing statutory committees (in respect of the Minister of Justice);*

(c) *appointing chairpersons and deputy chairpersons to statutory committees; and*

(d) *allocating seats on statutory committees (in respect of the Minister of Justice);*

shall apply as they apply after all Ministerial offices have been filled following the election of the Assembly.

(4) *The Business Committee shall review the allocation of seats on statutory committees made under Standing Order 49(2) as soon as is practicable following the application of this order.”*

The following motions stood in the Order Paper:

(b) After Standing Order 49A (as inserted above) insert —

“49B. MEMBERSHIP OF COMMITTEE FOR JUSTICE

A person cannot be a member of the statutory committee established to advise and assist the Minister of Justice if that person is a member of the Northern Ireland Policing Board, a district policing partnership or a sub-group of the Belfast district policing partnership.” — [The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Lord Morrow).]

(c) After Standing Order 52 insert —

“52A. CHANGES IN THE NUMBER OF STANDING COMMITTEES

(1) *This order applies in respect of changes in the number of standing committees, including changes by way of —*

(a) *the establishment of a new standing committee; or*

(b) *the dissolution of an existing standing committee;*

subsequent to the application of the procedure set out in Standing Order 51 following the election of the Assembly.

(2) *All chairpersons and deputy chairpersons of standing committees shall cease to hold their offices on those committees upon that change taking effect. All other members shall continue to hold their seats on those committees.*

(3) *The procedures set out in Standing Orders for —*

(a) *establishing standing committees (in respect of any new committee);*

(b) *appointing chairpersons and deputy chairpersons to standing committees; and*

(c) *allocating seats on standing committees (in respect of any new committees);*

shall apply as they apply following the election of the Assembly.

(4) *The Business Committee shall review the allocation of seats on standing committees*

made under Standing Order 52(2) as soon as is practicable following the application of this order.” — [The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Lord Morrow).]

(d) In Standing Order 59 after paragraph (4) insert —

“() The committee shall —

(a) review the operation of the amendments made by Schedules 2 to 5 to the Northern Ireland Act 2009;

(b) report on its review by 30 April 2012; and

(c) include in its report any recommendations it has for changes to the way in which judicial office holders are appointed and removed.” — [The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Lord Morrow).]

(e) In Standing Order 40(1)(a) line 1 leave out “Judicial Committee decide” and insert —

“Supreme Court decides” — [The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Lord Morrow).]

(f) In Standing Order 40(1)(b) line 1 leave out “Judicial Committee made by the Attorney General for Northern Ireland” and insert —

“Supreme Court made by the Advocate General for Northern Ireland or the Attorney General for Northern Ireland” — [The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Lord Morrow).]

(g) In Standing Order 44(3) line 3 after “1998” insert —

“, otherwise than by virtue of an Assembly election,” — [The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Lord Morrow).]

(h) In Standing Order 44 after paragraph (4) insert —

“(5) This order does not apply in respect of the Minister of Justice or the office of Minister of Justice.” — [The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Lord Morrow).]

(i) In Standing Order 46(2) line 1 leave out “Committees to assist the Assembly in the discharge of its business shall be appointed” and insert —

“Committees shall be established” — [The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Lord Morrow).]

(j) In Standing Order 47 leave out from “following” in line 3 until the end of line 8 and insert —

“after —

(a) all Ministerial offices have been filled following the election of the Assembly; and

(b) the Business Committee has considered the matter and made a recommendation having had regard to —” — [The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Lord Morrow).]

(k) In Standing Order 48(1) line 1 leave out “As soon as practicable after the appointment of Ministers” and insert —

“As soon as is practicable after the Assembly makes a determination under Standing Order 47” — [The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Lord Morrow).]

(l) In Standing Order 51(1) in line 5 and line 6 leave out “process” in both places where it occurs and insert —

“procedure” — [The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Lord Morrow).]

(m) In Standing Order 51, after paragraph (1) insert —

“() The procedure set out in this order shall be applied as soon as is practicable following the election of the Assembly.” — [The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Lord Morrow).]

(n) In Standing Order 60(1) line 1 leave out “appoint” and insert —

“establish” — [The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Lord Morrow).]

(o) In Standing Order 93(1)(a) line 1 leave out “Judicial Committee decides” and insert —

“Supreme Court decides” — [The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Lord Morrow).]

(p) In Standing Order 93(1)(b) line 1 leave out “Judicial Committee made by the Attorney General for Northern Ireland” and insert —

“Supreme Court made by the Advocate General for Northern Ireland or the Attorney General for Northern Ireland” — [The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Lord Morrow).]

A large number of amendments to Standing Orders are before the House for consideration, most of which are needed as a result of the anticipated devolution of policing and justice powers on 12 April 2010.

A great deal of work has gone into producing these amendments to Standing Orders, and it started as far back as April 2009, with the bulk of the work being done since January 2010. The Committee on Procedures has had

to grapple with many technical issues. It has had to consult other Committees and respective parties that are represented on it, and I thank members for their dedication.

On 9 March 2010, the House approved the Standing Order on the appointment of a Minister of Justice. During this debate, the Assembly will consider amending Standing Orders to deal with the increased number of Statutory Committees and Standing Committees; the membership of a Committee for Justice; the production of a report on the appointment and removal of judicial officers and office-holders; and some 13 minor technical and consequential amendments.

Currently, Standing Orders do not provide for what happens to Committees if a new Minister is appointed during a mandate. Therefore, there is no direction on whether d'Hondt needs to be run afresh or just continued from the previous time that it was used. That meant that the Committee on Procedures had to consider whether the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson of the new Committee for Justice should be appointed by taking the next two parties that would have been due for appointment from the previous time that d'Hondt was run for Committees or whether there should be a complete rerun of d'Hondt for all Committees.

Committee members consulted with their parties, and it was agreed that d'Hondt should be rerun from scratch for all Committee Chairpersons and Deputy Chairpersons. The proposed new Standing Order 49A provides that when the new Department of Justice is established, d'Hondt will be run for the appointment of Chairpersons and Deputy Chairpersons of all Statutory Committees, including the new Justice Committee. All other Committee members will continue to hold their seats, but the Business Committee will consider the allocation of seats on the Statutory Committees as soon as is practicable.

That Standing Order will be used only following the establishment of the office of the Minister of Justice, so, at a later stage, the Committee on Procedures may look at replacing it with a more general provision. The Assembly and Executive Review Committee's 'First Report on the Arrangements for the Devolution of Policing and Justice Matters' recommended that there should be a convention that a member of the

Justice Committee could not also be a member of the Policing Board or a district policing partnership (DPP). The proposed new Standing Order 49B makes that provision and adds that a Justice Committee member cannot also be a member of any of the four subgroups of the Belfast DPP. That had not been considered in the Assembly and Executive Review Committee's first report, but it was agreed by the Committee at a recent meeting.

During its deliberations, the Committee on Procedures also looked at what should happen if a new Standing Committee is established. That is not related to the devolution of policing and justice powers, but members agreed that if a new Standing Committee is established, d'Hondt should be run for the Chairpersons and Deputy Chairpersons of all Standing Committees. As with the Statutory Committees, Standing Committee members would not be required to stand down, but the Business Committee would look at the allocation of Standing Committee seats as soon as is practicable. The proposed new Standing Order 52A provides for all that.

The process of developing the proposed amendments to the Standing Orders on Statutory and Standing Committees indicated that a number of more general amendments to those Standing Orders would allow increased flexibility for the Assembly if there is a change in the number of Committees or if there is a change in membership. Therefore, we may revisit those Standing Orders in the future.

There is a requirement in schedule 6 to the Northern Ireland Act 2009 that an Assembly Committee is to review the arrangements for judicial appointments and removals by May 2012. However, the Act is silent on which Committee that should be. The options that the Committee on Procedures considered for carrying out the review were the Assembly and Executive Review Committee, the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM), or the new Justice Committee. In considering the options, the Assembly and Executive Review Committee seemed the most appropriate, as there could be a tension between the Justice Committee and the judiciary, and any relationship with the OFMDFM Committee is less clear-cut.

Therefore, it is proposed to amend Standing Order 59 to require the Assembly and Executive

Review Committee to undertake a review of judicial appointments and removals and to report on the review by 30 April 2012, that is, before May 2012. However, although that Committee had agreed to carry out the review, I understand that it may be reconsidering its decision. Therefore, a future amendment to Standing Orders may be needed.

Some 13 minor technical and consequential amendments need to be made as a result of some of the proposed changes to Standing Orders that I have mentioned. Some are required because of legislative changes. I do not intend to go through those individually, but I want to point out that there is an addition to the title of Standing Order 44 to make it clear that that Standing Order does not apply to the Minister of Justice. That is not an amendment as such, and Members are not required to vote on it, although they will be voting on the same matter that is being clarified in the body of Standing Order 44.

A great deal of work has gone into producing the amendments, and more needs to be done in relation to the Attorney General for Northern Ireland and, possibly, the Public Prosecution Service, because their relationship with the Assembly is unclear at this stage. I commend the amendments to the House.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Chathaoirleach as an obair atá déanta aige, agus ba mhaith liom fosta mo bhuíochas a ghabháil le foireann an Choiste as an obair a rinne siad.

I thank the Chairperson. As he said, the amendments represented a complicated piece of work, but he brought a focus to it and steered the Committee through it. I also offer my thanks to the Committee Clerk and her staff for their work.

The Chairperson has outlined that the changes to Standing Orders are important because of the imminent transfer of policing and justice powers to the Assembly. Among the matters that he mentioned are the selection of the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Justice, issues around membership of that Committee and the DPPs, and judicial appointments. I have nothing further to add other than to say that Sinn Féin supports the changes.

Mr McClarty: I welcome and support the motions to amend Standing Orders. Proposed new Standing Orders 49A and 49B are a somewhat convoluted way of reinforcing and making clear the status quo. The new Standing Orders will provide that, once a Justice Minister has been appointed, a Justice Committee will be established, its membership will be set by the Business Committee in the normal way and its Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson will be appointed in the normal way through the means of d'Hondt.

The system for appointing a Committee and its Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson was part of the basis on which the Assembly was elected. When the Assembly election took place in 2007, all parties and the public knew how Committees were to be formed and how we would arrive at a decision on who would chair those Committees. It would be entirely wrong for the Assembly to alter those rules midterm. It would be inappropriate for us to seek to alter the rules of the game to suit our own political interests. The Assembly's rules are clear and understood, and no party has sought a mandate to change them in order to distort the balance of power in the Chamber from that bestowed by the electorate three years ago. I make those comments because of the rank hypocrisy that the motions before us demonstrate on the part of the DUP/Sinn Féin coalition.

New Standing Orders 49A and 49B highlight the rules. Last Friday's 'Belfast Telegraph' stated that the DUP intends to use its temporary position as the largest unionist party to take the position of Chairperson of the Committee for Justice. It is perfectly entitled to do that, but it is not entitled to change the rules for appointing Ministers in order to distort the wishes of the electorate with regard to the composition of the Executive. If d'Hondt is good enough for the appointment of Committee Chairpersons, it should be good enough for the appointment of Ministers. If the DUP and Sinn Féin have a deal between themselves not to take a ministerial position, that is their prerogative. However, it is not their prerogative to gerrymander the system to suit themselves. I support the motions.

Mr O'Loan: I declare an interest as a member of Ballymena District Policing Partnership. Notwithstanding any broader comments that I could make around the issues, I give my consent to the proposed Standing Orders.

Mr Neeson: I will speak only once in the debate. The changes to Standing Orders are important to facilitate the operation of the devolution of policing and justice. The Committee put significant work into the issue, and I thank the Committee Clerk and her staff and the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson for focusing us on the important changes that are taking place.

6.45 pm

Perhaps the most significant issue is the election of the Chairperson of the Committee for Justice. The Committee on Procedures was unanimous that there should be a rerun of the election of all Chairpersons and Deputy Chairpersons of all the Statutory Committees of the Assembly. That makes sense, bearing in mind the importance associated with the devolution of policing and justice powers. As the Chairperson of the Committee pointed out, we thought that it was logical that those who are members of the Policing Board or the district policing partnerships would not become members of the Committee for Justice.

What we have before us today will move the devolution of policing and justice a step closer, and I support all the motions that are being put forward today.

Lord Browne: I support motions (a) to (p) to amend Standing Orders. Although I doubt that today's debate will gain as much public attention as the vote that was taken in the Chamber two weeks ago, we are, nevertheless, undertaking important decisions this evening. This debate is important for two reasons. The amendments to Standing Orders give the necessary framework to let the Department of Justice function while, at the same time, ensuring that it is accountable to the Assembly and the public. Secondly, the amendments are a fulfilment of the promises made to the public in the Hillsborough agreement, and they reflect the will of the vast majority of people in Northern Ireland.

The content of the motions comprehensively dispels the myths created by those who oppose the Hillsborough agreement and set in stone the commitment that we made to the people of Northern Ireland. Indeed, it is a reflection of the success of the Hillsborough agreement and its widespread public support. It is to be commended that the amendments to Standing

Orders are being tabled so soon, and that is due to the hard work of the staff and the Committee.

Not only is this one of the final steps in completing the devolution of policing and justice powers, it demonstrates to the public that the Assembly can really work for them and have a positive impact on their lives. It also proves that the Assembly can handle the responsibility of creating robust legislation that can give effect to the will of the people. The amendments are proof that the Assembly can deliver for the people of Northern Ireland, and I am confident that, in the next weeks, hard work will continue to address the other amendments that will possibly be necessary to deliver that.

Mr Storey: I echo the Chairperson's words of thanks to the Committee for its hard work in producing the additions and amendments to Standing Orders. They are quite technical in nature, and additional sittings of the Committee have been necessary to ensure that the Assembly is in a position to establish the new Committee for Justice after the Department of Justice comes into being and has the necessary Standing Orders in place to facilitate all the related devolution issues.

However, the Committee has more work to do on other policing and justice matters that are to be devolved on 12 April. That includes the Attorney General and the Public Prosecution Service. At this stage, we do not know what relationship either of those will have with the Assembly or how they will be accountable. That needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency.

Section 25 of the Justice (Northern Ireland) Act 2002 provides that the Attorney General will have non-voting participation in Assembly proceedings to the extent permitted by Standing Orders. At this time, we have no information on how that relationship will work in practice, so we have nothing on which to base the Standing Orders. We do not know whether the Attorney General will appear on the Floor of the House to answer Assembly questions or to respond to motions, or whether he will be limited to appearing before Committees. We shall keep the matter under review as information becomes available, and I expect that we shall come back to the House with further amendments in the near future.

There is also a difficulty with the Public Prosecution Service, which is to be a non-ministerial Department. Consideration must

be given to how the service will be answerable to the Assembly, including consideration of the matter of who will answer Assembly questions and respond to motions. The Minister of Justice will have no role in that, and given that the Attorney General is required by legislation to act in a consultative capacity to the PPS, it is unclear whether he will be able to respond on its behalf. Therefore, more research has to be done before the Committee on Procedures can develop Standing Orders to deal with those matters and introduce the necessary Standing Orders to the Assembly.

I thank the Members who made a constructive contribution to the debate. It is unfortunate that Mr McClarty did not raise his political points in Committee, rather than engaging in political grandstanding in the Chamber. I commend the motions to the House.

Mr McClarty: Will the Member give way?

Mr Storey: Yes, I will give way to the Member.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has concluded. I am sorry.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

(a) After Standing Order 49 insert —

“49A. ESTABLISHMENT OF COMMITTEE FOR JUSTICE

(1) This order applies where, subsequent to all Ministerial offices being filled following the election of the Assembly, the office of Minister of Justice is established.

(2) All chairpersons and deputy chairpersons of statutory committees shall cease to hold their offices on those committees. All other members shall continue to hold their seats on those committees.

(3) The procedures set out in Standing Orders for —

(a) determining the number of statutory committees;

(b) establishing statutory committees (in respect of the Minister of Justice);

(c) appointing chairpersons and deputy chairpersons to statutory committees; and

(d) allocating seats on statutory committees (in respect of the Minister of Justice);

shall apply as they apply after all Ministerial offices have been filled following the election of the Assembly.

(4) The Business Committee shall review the allocation of seats on statutory committees made under Standing Order 49(2) as soon as is practicable following the application of this order.”

Resolved (with cross-community support):

(b) After Standing Order 49A (as inserted above) insert —

“49B. MEMBERSHIP OF COMMITTEE FOR JUSTICE

A person cannot be a member of the statutory committee established to advise and assist the Minister of Justice if that person is a member of the Northern Ireland Policing Board, a district policing partnership or a sub-group of the Belfast district policing partnership.” — [The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Lord Morrow).]

Resolved (with cross-community support):

(c) After Standing Order 52 insert —

“52A. CHANGES IN THE NUMBER OF STANDING COMMITTEES

(1) This order applies in respect of changes in the number of standing committees, including changes by way of —

(a) the establishment of a new standing committee; or

(b) the dissolution of an existing standing committee;

subsequent to the application of the procedure set out in Standing Order 51 following the election of the Assembly.

(2) All chairpersons and deputy chairpersons of standing committees shall cease to hold their offices on those committees upon that change taking effect. All other members shall continue to hold their seats on those committees.

(3) The procedures set out in Standing Orders for —

(a) establishing standing committees (in respect of any new committee);

(b) appointing chairpersons and deputy chairpersons to standing committees; and

(c) allocating seats on standing committees (in respect of any new committees);

shall apply as they apply following the election of the Assembly.

(4) *The Business Committee shall review the allocation of seats on standing committees made under Standing Order 52(2) as soon as is practicable following the application of this order.* — [The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Lord Morrow).]

Resolved (with cross-community support):

(d) *In Standing Order 59 after paragraph (4) insert —*

“() The committee shall –

(a) review the operation of the amendments made by Schedules 2 to 5 to the Northern Ireland Act 2009;

(b) report on its review by 30 April 2012; and

(c) include in its report any recommendations it has for changes to the way in which judicial office holders are appointed and removed. — [The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Lord Morrow).]

Resolved (with cross-community support):

(e) *In Standing Order 40(1)(a) line 1 leave out “Judicial Committee decide” and insert —*

“Supreme Court decides” — [The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Lord Morrow).]

Resolved (with cross-community support):

(f) *In Standing Order 40(1)(b) line 1 leave out “Judicial Committee made by the Attorney General for Northern Ireland” and insert —*

“Supreme Court made by the Advocate General for Northern Ireland or the Attorney General for Northern Ireland” — The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Lord Morrow).]

Resolved (with cross-community support):

(g) *In Standing Order 44(3) line 3 after “1998” insert —*

“, otherwise than by virtue of an Assembly election,” — [The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Lord Morrow).]

Resolved (with cross-community support):

(h) *In Standing Order 44 after paragraph (4) insert —*

“(5) This order does not apply in respect of the Minister of Justice or the office of Minister of Justice.” — [The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Lord Morrow).]

Resolved (with cross-community support):

(i) *In Standing Order 46(2) line 1 leave out “Committees to assist the Assembly in the discharge of its business shall be appointed” and insert —*

“Committees shall be established” — [The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Lord Morrow).]

Resolved (with cross-community support):

(j) *In Standing Order 47 leave out from “following” in line 3 until the end of line 8 and insert —*

“after —

(a) all Ministerial offices have been filled following the election of the Assembly; and

(b) the Business Committee has considered the matter and made a recommendation having had regard to ” — [The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Lord Morrow).]

Resolved (with cross-community support):

(k) *In Standing Order 48(1) line 1 leave out “As soon as practicable after the appointment of Ministers” and insert —*

“As soon as is practicable after the Assembly makes a determination under Standing Order 47” — [The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Lord Morrow).]

Resolved (with cross-community support):

(l) *In Standing Order 51(1) in line 5 and line 6 leave out “process” in both places where it occurs and insert —*

“procedure” — [The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Lord Morrow).]

Resolved (with cross-community support):

(m) *In Standing Order 51, after paragraph (1) insert —*

“() The procedure set out in this order shall be applied as soon as is practicable following the election of the Assembly.” — [The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Lord Morrow).]

Resolved (with cross-community support):

(n) *In Standing Order 60(1) line 1 leave out “appoint” and insert —*

“establish” — [The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Lord Morrow).]

Resolved (with cross-community support):

(o) *In Standing Order 93(1)(a) line 1 leave out “Judicial Committee decides” and insert —*

“Supreme Court decides” — [The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Lord Morrow).]

Resolved (with cross-community support):

(p) In Standing Order 93(1)(b) line 1 leave out “Judicial Committee made by the Attorney General for Northern Ireland” and insert —

“Supreme Court made by the Advocate General for Northern Ireland or the Attorney General for Northern Ireland” — [The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Lord Morrow).]

Mr Deputy Speaker: We now move to the second group that consists only of motion (q), as stated on the Order Paper.

The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures: I beg to move

(q) Leave out Standing Order 73 and insert –

“73. SUB JUDICE

(1) A member shall not, in any proceedings of the Assembly, refer to any matter in respect of which legal proceedings are active (within the meaning of section 2 of the Contempt of Court Act 1981) except to the extent permitted by the Speaker.

(2) Where the proceedings are committee proceedings, paragraph (1) applies as if the reference to the Speaker were a reference to the chairperson of that committee.

(3) Nothing in this order shall prevent the Assembly from considering legislation.”

I wish to place on record my thanks to the staff and the Committee Clerk for all their help and assistance and my appreciation for how they applied themselves to the task.

The Committee on Procedures regularly reviews Standing Orders as part of its forward work programme and agreed to include a review of Standing Order 73, which covers sub judice. Members will wish to note that it is not related in any way to the devolution of policing and justice powers. It is purely coincidental that the Committee on Procedures agreed Standing Order 73 at the same meeting at which it considered and agreed the Standing Orders to facilitate the devolution of policing and justice.

Section 41 of, and schedule 6 to, the Northern Ireland Act 1998 require Standing Orders to make provision for the sub judice rule, and Standing Order 73 makes that provision. The current Standing Order provides that any matter that is awaiting adjudication in court may not

be referred to in a motion, debate, question or statement. Standing Order 73 is long, repetitive and, unlike the other Standing Orders, it is unclear whether it applies to Committees. During its deliberations, the Committee on Procedures learned that although the Standing Order, as it stands, applies only to plenary business, it applies in spirit to Committee proceedings in open session and to the timing of the publication of Committee reports. The Committee considered whether it should be made explicit that the conditions of the Standing Order also apply to Committees, as happens in the Standing Orders of the Scottish Parliament and the National Assembly for Wales. Another issue is that the Standing Order refers to “the chairperson” but the items of business to which it refers relate only to plenary business, over which the Speaker presides.

The Committee, therefore, agreed that a major revision of Standing Order 73 was needed and considered the following options: producing a complete redraft along the lines of the relevant Standing Order of the Scottish Parliament; adding a paragraph to the end of Standing Order 73, stating that it either in whole or in part applies to Committees; or creating a new Standing Order that repeats the provision for Committees, perhaps in the section of Standing Orders that deals with Committees. In any case, the Committee agreed to amend the reference to the chairperson to tie in with the chosen option.

Members agreed that all three options clarified the position but that a redraft along the lines of the relevant Standing Order of the Scottish Parliament had the added benefit of leading to a much more succinct Standing Order. In consideration of plain English guidelines, it was suggested that the title of the Standing Order be changed from the Latin “sub judice” to the English “matters under judicial deliberation”. However, members agreed that, as most people are familiar with term “sub judice”, the title should not be changed.

The motion to amend clarifies and simplifies the procedure for debate in the Assembly on matters subject to judicial deliberation, which is also known as the sub judice rule. If legal proceedings are active, they cannot be referred to in the Assembly without the permission of the Speaker. In the case of Committee proceedings, the permission of the Chairperson of the Committee is required. The Standing Order applies to criminal proceedings, civil

proceedings and proceedings in coroners' courts, including inquests and tribunals.

The amended Standing Order refers to the Contempt of Court Act 1981, which is still in force and applies to Northern Ireland. If the Act is ever repealed and re-enacted, it will not be necessary to amend Standing Orders, as that is provided for by the Interpretation Act (Northern Ireland) 1954. The Committee should, therefore, not need to revisit Standing Order 73.

In summary, there is no difference in the way in which the sub judice rule will operate. However, the new Standing Order is much shorter, and it is now clear that it applies to proceedings in Committees as well as on the Floor of the House. I commend the motion to the House.

7.00 pm

Mr Deputy 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):

(q) Leave out Standing Order 73 and insert –

“73. SUB JUDICE

(1) A member shall not, in any proceedings of the Assembly, refer to any matter in respect of which legal proceedings are active (within the meaning of section 2 of the Contempt of Court Act 1981) except to the extent permitted by the Speaker.

(2) Where the proceedings are committee proceedings, paragraph (1) applies as if the reference to the Speaker were a reference to the chairperson of that committee.

(3) Nothing in this order shall prevent the Assembly from considering legislation.”

Annual Salary of the Comptroller and Auditor General

The Chairperson of the Audit Committee

(Mr Weir): I beg to move

That this Assembly determines that from 1 April 2010, until such time as the Assembly makes a further determination, the salary to be paid, under article 4(1) of the Audit (Northern Ireland) Order 1987, to the holder of the office of Comptroller and Auditor General, shall be the same as the amount which was paid from 1 April 2009 to 31 March 2010.

As Chairperson of the Audit Committee, I ask the Assembly to support the motion. The Audit (Northern Ireland) Order 1987 states that the salary of the Comptroller and Auditor General shall be determined by a resolution of the Assembly. Last year's resolution of the Assembly provided for the Comptroller and Auditor General to be paid a certain amount until 31 March 2010. Therefore, the Assembly needs to take a further resolution in advance of that date to cover the Comptroller and Auditor General's salary from 1 April 2010 onwards. The Audit Committee has had a good relationship with the Comptroller and Auditor General, and Members will acknowledge that he is a good friend of the Assembly. However, I fear that that friendship would be put under some strain if we were to refuse to pay him a salary.

The Audit Committee met on 9 March 2010 to consider the issue. This is the third year in which the Audit Committee has had responsibility for bringing forward such a motion to the Assembly. Prior to this, during suspension, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, supported by the Department of Finance and Personnel, made an order determining what the salary should be. During that period, agreement was reached that the salary should be tied into the amount that is payable to those at judicial level 5. The salary payable at judicial level 5, similar to other judicial and senior salaries, is determined by the Government on the foot of recommendations from the Senior Salaries Review Body.

In 2008, when the Audit Committee assumed responsibility for the matter, it considered all available evidence and decided to maintain the link between the Comptroller and Auditor General's salary and the salary that is payable at judicial level 5. However, it should be noted that, despite that, the salary of the Comptroller and Auditor General last year edged ahead of

that which is payable at judicial level 5. That was because the Assembly resolved to pay the Comptroller and Auditor General the amount that was recommended by the Senior Salaries Review Body as payable at judicial level 5 and not the amount that was ultimately agreed by the Government. That happened because the Assembly had to agree a resolution on the Comptroller and Auditor General's salary before the final outcome of the salary determinations at Westminster being known.

The Audit Committee noted that and agreed to consider the options open to it to allow the Assembly always to determine the salary of the Comptroller and Auditor General after other comparable senior salaries have been agreed. That is important, because the approach of tying the Comptroller and Auditor General's salary to that of a comparable officer is sound and is well worth maintaining. It is fair and transparent, and it reduces the potential for the Assembly to be seen as determining the salary in response to political or any other factors.

If we accept that principle, we must also accept that the Comptroller and Auditor General's salary must remain the same this year. This year, the Government have determined that senior salaries, including those at judicial level 5, should not increase. The reasons for that are spelled out in this year's report to the Prime Minister from the Senior Salaries Review Body. The report refers to how public finances are showing an unprecedented deficit and how substantial reductions in public spending will, therefore, be necessary in the coming year to redress the balance. The review body took those factors into account and concluded that there was no justification for general pay increases in its remit groups this year.

These are difficult economic times. The Audit Committee is of the view that the salary of the Comptroller and Auditor General should, as far as possible, be tied to the salary that is payable at judicial level 5. The Assembly cannot resolve to reduce the salary of the Comptroller and Auditor General as it does not have the power to do so. Therefore, the Assembly is being asked to agree that the salary payable to the Comptroller and Auditor General should be frozen at the amount that was payable last year. I ask the Assembly to support the motion.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly determines that from 1 April 2010, until such time as the Assembly makes a further determination, the salary to be paid, under article 4(1) of the Audit (Northern Ireland) Order 1987, to the holder of the office of Comptroller and Auditor General, shall be the same as the amount which was paid from 1 April 2009 to 31 March 2010.

Adjourned at 7.04 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 23 March 2010

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Executive Committee Business

Budget (No. 2) Bill: Consideration Stage

Mr Deputy Speaker: I call on the Minister of Finance and Personnel to move the Consideration Stage of the Budget (No. 2) Bill.

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

Mr Deputy Speaker: No amendments have been tabled to the Bill. I propose, therefore, by leave of the Assembly, to group the six clauses of the Bill for the Question on stand part, followed by the two schedules and the long title.

Clauses 1 to 6 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Schedules 1 and 2 agreed to.

Long title agreed to.

Mr Deputy Speaker: That concludes Consideration Stage of the Budget (No. 2) Bill. The Bill stands referred to the Speaker.

Unsolicited Services (Trade and Business Directories) Bill: First Stage

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mrs Foster): I beg to introduce the Unsolicited Services (Trade and Business Directories) Bill [NIA 12/09], which is a Bill to make provision about charges for entries in trade or business directories.

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.

Debt Relief Bill: Second Stage

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mrs Foster): I beg to move

That the Second Stage of the Debt Relief Bill [NIA 9/09] be agreed.

First, I want to outline the background to the problem that the Bill addresses. The consumer credit industry gets a bad press, yet access to affordable credit can bring significant benefits. For example, it enables those setting up home for the first time to purchase the furniture that they need and those faced with a domestic crisis, such as needing to replace a fridge or a washing machine, to source money when they need it.

Until recently, most people could manage associated repayments. The results of a survey, which were included in a report prepared by the equality directorate research branch of the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) in 2006 — well before the current credit crunch — showed that 80% of individuals had no problems repaying their debts. Of the remaining 20%, 15% said that they had sometimes encountered problems, and just 4% said that they had frequent problems or problems most of the time.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that there has been an increase in the number of people with a problem debt, with Citizens Advice reporting a 21% increase in the number of clients seeking advice under the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment-funded debt advice service in 2008-09.

There has always been a minority of people who, unfortunately, have got into difficulty repaying their debts for reasons that are no fault of their own. Causes of that difficulty include loss of employment and inability to work due to ill health or marriage breakdown, which leaves one

or both spouses struggling to meet household bills. However, as we are all only too well aware, over the past couple of years, a major new factor — the current economic recession — has impacted negatively on the ability of borrowers to repay. That led to debt advisers reporting that they had been swamped with requests for help.

I have already taken measures to assist advice organisations and their clients. My Department funds two free face-to-face debt advice services that are operated by Citizens Advice and Advice NI and a free telephone advice service provided by A4e. Some 8,500 cases have been dealt with and assisted by those services since Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) funding was first made available in 2006.

Non-statutory forms of agreement are generally debt management plans. A debt management plan (DMP) is an informal non-binding arrangement where creditors accept payment from a debtor's available income on an agreed proportional basis. The DMP is a feature of debt advice in the funded and non-funded debt advice industry, and although it may never clear the total debt, it gives some protection to debtors from the pressure of debt recovery companies. The DMP is by far the most used remedy in the contracted debt advice services provided by both Citizens Advice and Advice NI.

Total departmental funding for debt advice services will be £1 million per annum until 2012, and those new measures are in addition to the statutory measures, such as individual voluntary arrangements (IVAs) and bankruptcy, which form the bedrock solution for dealing with problem debt. Under chapter 2 of part 8 of the Insolvency (Northern Ireland) Order 1989, IVAs enable individuals to spread repayments over a longer period. Almost 1,400 such arrangements have been entered into over the past two years. IVAs are only suitable for people who are not in a position to fully pay off debts by the due date but who can afford to make a significant level of repayments. At present, the alternative for those who cannot pay their debts at all is bankruptcy.

Bankruptcy will protect debtors from action by their creditors for a one-year period at the end of which their liability to repay their debts is completely cancelled. Bankruptcy takes place on foot of a petition to the Northern Ireland High Court. One clear disadvantage of that route is that despite being in debt and not being able to repay it, the debtor must raise £345 to pay

a deposit and £115 to pay a court fee. Those unable to afford those payments face the prospect of going through the rest of their lives burdened by a debt that they cannot pay.

The purpose of the Bill is to give a section of those who are unable to afford the costs of bankruptcy access to similar relief. It will do so by providing for the establishment of a debt relief scheme in Northern Ireland, similar to the one that came into operation in England and Wales in April last year. The scheme is intended for those with moderate levels of debt. Bankruptcy, with its emphasis on investigation, will remain the more appropriate remedy for those with higher levels of debt.

The key advantage of the new scheme is that the making of an order to relieve an individual of debt is an administrative task that the office of the Official Receiver can carry out, at less than one third of the cost of the conventional route of a petition to the High Court. The Official Receiver is an official in my Department who is also an officer of the court.

The Bill contains nine clauses and one schedule, which makes minor and consequential amendments. Clause 1 inserts extensive provision into the Insolvency (Northern Ireland) Order 1989, which is Northern Ireland's main primary legislation that deals with insolvency.

That provision will enable individuals who are unable to pay their debts to apply to the Official Receiver for what is termed a debt relief order. As with bankruptcy, a debt relief order will not cover, and, therefore, will not cancel, liability to repay all debts. For example, the debtor will remain liable for student loans and court fines, and secured debts will not be covered either.

Application for a debt relief order will have to be made through an approved intermediary. Our plan is that the approved intermediaries will be individuals who are skilled and experienced in providing debt counselling. They will have to be approved by competent authorities that are designated by my Department. They will assess clients' eligibility for the scheme and assist them with the completion of applications, which they will then submit electronically to the Official Receiver on clients' behalf. The applicant will then have to pay a fee, the amount of which will be set in subordinate legislation. The fee is £90 under the scheme in England and Wales. The Official Receiver will consider the application when the fee has been paid.

The Official Receiver will be able to raise queries with the debtor but must ultimately refuse the application or make a debt relief order. Various grounds for refusing an application are set out in clause 1, including the making of false representations or omissions in the application or not meeting conditions set out in the new schedule that is inserted in the Insolvency (Northern Ireland) Order 1989 by clause 2. As I said, clause 2 inserts a schedule into that Order that allows eligibility limits to be set in subordinate legislation on the total sum that an individual can owe, the total value of his assets and how much surplus income he can have in a month. Under the scheme in England and Wales, those limits have been set at £15,000, £300 and £50 respectively.

The Official Receiver will work on the basis that the information that is supplied by the debtor is correct, although there will be verification checks on the eligibility conditions. Those arrangements will be prescribed in subordinate legislation. If the Official Receiver decides to make a debt relief order, he will be required to give a copy to the debtor and to record the making of the order in a register. He will have to notify creditors and inform them of the grounds on which they can object.

Entry in the register marks the start of a one-year moratorium, during which creditors will be barred from taking action or proceedings except with permission of the court. Provision is included to allow that one-year period to be extended or terminated early. A list of the debts that are covered, which are termed qualifying debts, will be included with each debt relief order. In the normal course of events, the debtor will be fully discharged from those debts on the first anniversary of the date on which the order is registered. Debtors will be placed under a duty to co-operate with the Official Receiver and to report any relevant change in their circumstances.

The Official Receiver will be empowered to carry out investigations on his own initiative or at the behest of creditors. There will be various grounds on which the Official Receiver will be able to revoke a debt relief order, including when the debtor has supplied incomplete, incorrect or otherwise misleading information. Anyone who is dissatisfied with any act, omission or decision of the Official Receiver will be able to apply to the High Court. Moreover, the Official

Receiver will be able to apply to the High Court for direction.

It is crucial to creditor confidence in the scheme that the information that is supplied by debtors is accurate and truthful, and to ensure that it is, a range of offences and appropriate penalties will be created. There will be penalties for false representations and omissions, concealment or falsification of documents, fraudulent disposal of property and fraudulent dealings with property that is obtained on credit. It will also be an offence to take credit or to engage in business under a different name during the first year after the making of a debt relief order.

Clause 3 makes provisions for debtors to be placed under continuing restrictions as regards taking credit or the name under which they can trade following expiry of the initial one-year moratorium. Grounds are set out on which my Department, or the Official Receiver acting on direction from my Department, will be able to apply to the High Court for a restrictions order that lasts from two to 15 years. As an alternative, my Department will be able to accept an undertaking from the debtor with equivalent effect.

Clause 4 gives my Department the legislative authority to provide advice and information to the public about the relief of debt or to pay others to do so. Clause 5 gives my Department power to make consequential amendments, and clause 6 gives effect to the schedule containing minor and consequential amendments. Clause 7 deals with commencement, clause 8 is the interpretation, and clause 9 sets out the short title of the Bill.

10.45 am

In summary, the Bill will provide much needed relief for a section of society, in particular, those least well-off, who are burdened by debt that they simply and honestly cannot pay. The scheme will not make them better off financially, but it will free them from the financial millstone that hangs around their neck. It takes a measured and balanced approach; it assists debtors, but not at the expense of those to whom they owe money.

The scheme is designed to help those whose financial circumstances are so bad that they cannot reasonably be expected to make any payments to their creditors. The making of a debt relief order will amount to nothing more

than formal recognition that the debtor cannot pay and that, therefore, there is no point in creditors pressing or hounding the debtor for payment. Cancellation of debts will give a debtor hope. It will give them a chance to start a new chapter in their lives, free from the stigma of being burdened by debt, and it will achieve, we hope, financial rehabilitation. The debt relief scheme is intended to be a simple, streamlined affair for those with simple, straightforward debts and little in the way of assets or surplus income. It will not be open to homeowners. Bankruptcy will continue to be the remedy for homeowners or those with other assets.

My Department carried out extensive consultation on the proposed scheme. We received 22 responses, 16 of which were substantive; two respondents had misgivings. The first was a council, worried about the impact on revenue as a result of arrears of rates being written off. In practice, however, any impact will be lessened by the fact that the scheme will be open only to those who live in rented accommodation. In the majority of cases, it is landlords, not tenants, including those in Housing Executive tenancies, who are responsible for the payment of rates. The Irish League of Credit Unions (ILCU) also responded to the consultation with misgivings; it was worried about borrowers exploiting the scheme to avoid repaying loans. During a meeting with the ILCU, my officials explained that it will be possible for credit unions to safeguard against any such event by insisting that borrowers keep a savings balance in excess of the asset level for eligibility for debt relief, which will probably be in or around £300.

Debt relief schemes have been established in England and Wales. We would be justified in not proceeding with a scheme in Northern Ireland only if there was evidence to suggest that higher levels of abuse would occur here, and, frankly, there is not. There will be safeguards against abuse: a ceiling on total debts for eligibility for the scheme will prevent fraudsters from taking advantage by running up large debts and availing themselves of the scheme to escape liability for repayment. A person who obtains a debt relief order will not be able to obtain another one for six years. As I have already outlined, offences and penalties will be created to combat would-be fraudsters. It will be possible for debtors who are found to be culpable to be placed under continuing restrictions as regards taking credit or the name under which they can trade after

the end of the initial year following the making of a debt relief order.

The scheme will be computer-based. The estimated set-up cost will be approximately £34,000; that amount may be higher if a fully automated ICT system is justified and approved. Annual running costs, mainly to pay for additional administrative staff to operate the scheme, will amount to £80,000 to £90,000. The set-up and running costs will be covered by the Department's budget. The fee to be charged to applicants will help to offset the annual running costs.

It is difficult to estimate the likely demand for the scheme. Various estimates, including a scaled-down figure of the projected number of applicants in England and Wales, suggest that it is likely that there will be between 500 and 1,000 applications each year. It is my aim to have the scheme up and running in Northern Ireland as soon as possible. It is important that those who could benefit from the scheme have the same rights as are enjoyed by people in England and Wales. I commend the Debt Relief Bill to the House.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mr A Maginness): I thank the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her comprehensive and detailed outline of the Debt Relief Bill. As Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment, I welcome the Bill in general, and I believe that the Committee supports it. I also welcome the opportunity to contribute to the debate.

The Department has kept the Committee informed as the Bill has developed. The Committee is grateful to the Minister and her officials for the comprehensive and timely briefings that we have received.

A key purpose of the Bill is to enable individuals who have no reasonable prospect of being able to pay their debts and who cannot afford to fund an individual voluntary arrangement or the cost of petitioning for bankruptcy to free themselves from what would otherwise be a lifetime burden of debt. That is a necessary reform, and one that will apply to a relatively small number of people. The prospect of creditors getting back any money is remote, to say the least. Departmental officials have assured the Committee that only those individuals who have no reasonable prospect of ever being able to pay their debts will be eligible for the scheme.

Another key purpose of the Bill is to give the Department the power to provide information and advice to the public on debt relief matters, either directly or through an arrangement with others. The Committee recently welcomed the Department for Social Development's (DSD) proposals for an integrated advice services strategy across Northern Ireland. The Committee has asked DSD to remain mindful of DETI's proposals for debt relief advice when developing the advice services strategy. Likewise, I urge the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to remain mindful of DSD's advice services proposals when considering arrangements for providing debt advice.

There will be further debate on the Bill. The Committee supports the principle of the Bill and will consider the proposals further during the evidence-gathering process, to which we look forward. I thank the Minister for introducing the legislation and for keeping the Committee well informed throughout the process.

Mr Moutray: I support the Debt Relief Bill. I commend the Minister for progressing the legislation and bringing the Bill to the House. It is a timely Bill, and one that will ultimately assist individuals who have moderate levels of debt that they have no realistic prospect of being able to repay; those individuals who have limited surplus income and assets; and those who cannot afford the deposit and fee to petition for bankruptcy.

Unfortunately, financial hardship is all too common in our society. There are individuals in our constituencies who struggle daily to survive. It is well known that people, through differing circumstances, have increased difficulty in repaying their debts, so it is paramount that the House take a proactive approach to helping those individuals where possible. There have always been individuals who have struggled to repay debts accrued, but it is abundantly clear that the recession has had a further negative effect on borrowers' ability to repay, hence the need for such a scheme.

The Minister has set up a number of free, local face-to-face debt advice services, and I commend her for that. However, the measures in place are only suitable for people who cannot pay off their debts by the due date but can afford to make some significant level of repayment. The only current alternative for those who cannot pay off their debts at all is

bankruptcy. The Minister has outlined problems associated with bankruptcy, such as having to pay fees, and so on. The Bill will allow those who are unable to afford the costs associated with bankruptcy access to similar relief.

It will also allow for a debt relief scheme in Northern Ireland similar to that in England and Wales, whose debt relief schemes became operational on 6 April 2009. The scheme will, therefore, align us on this important measure.

Ultimately, the Bill will assist people with moderate levels of debt who cannot afford to petition for bankruptcy. It will protect them from action by their creditors for one year, after which their liability to pay most categories of debt will be cancelled completely. It will provide assistance and relief to those who are burdened by such debt, not by making them better off financially but by taking the weight of such debt off their shoulders.

I trust that the Bill will begin to foster a long-term financial remedy for individuals who have ended up in difficult situations through no fault of their own. I welcome the Minister's proactivity and support the Second Stage of the Debt Relief Bill.

Ms J McCann: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I, too, welcome and support the Bill. We have had discussions in the House in recent times about the fact that debt has become a major concern for many people. It is important to remember that low-income families, who experience poverty already, are most affected by debt in times of increased financial difficulties. That is particularly the case for low-income families with young children who are struggling to pay for food, fuel, clothing and other basic necessities that we take for granted. It is important to remember that some people get into debt to pay for necessities rather than luxuries or extras.

One of the most disturbing issues is that children who live in poverty will not have the same life chances as other children. The fact that some children are forced to go without has an effect on their physical, mental and emotional health, their education and their lifetime opportunities generally. A knock-on effect of poverty is that people are forced to borrow and spiral into debt. The main thing that we can do is create economic conditions in which people have a job and have sufficient

income to pay for household necessities rather than having to seek credit.

The House has discussed other ways in which we can combat the problems. For example, tariffs for energy, electricity, gas and oil should be affordable, because some people cannot even afford to heat or light their homes. Also, the small print used by some credit companies does not go far enough to explain the high interest rates that will be charged. The interest on some loans rises every time a repayment is missed. That can result in people having to pay back two or three times the amount that they borrowed in the first place, which may have been a small amount to get them through a particular situation. Such people are increasingly vulnerable to loan sharks, and, indeed, some have been threatened when they cannot afford to repay loans. Individuals are exploiting people who are living in difficult circumstances. Therefore, measures such as the Debt Relief Bill and the face-to-face debt advice that some organisations deliver must be welcomed. Another way in which the issue could be addressed is through social fund loans, which have been mentioned in the House before. At the moment, people who may need a loan to buy oil or to pay bills cannot access social fund loans. We could look at changing that situation.

The Minister also mentioned credit unions, which have enabled many people from economically deprived communities to access loans for the first time. Credit unions do not ask for the same level of collateral as banks, and they are open to everyone, irrespective of economic situation, and can offer loans and good interest rates. Hopefully, legislation will be brought forward soon that enables credit unions to open up their services and to provide extra services.

11.00 am

Worry over debt has a detrimental effect on people's physical and emotional well-being. In our constituency offices we see it all the time: people come in who are in debt and have been so for a considerable period. I appeal to people to look for help early. There is a lot of help available, and there are organisations that can provide it. People may not know that, if they contact credit companies or firms that they owe money to, they will be given some leeway. People may be unable to take that step for themselves. I appeal to those in debt to

seek the help of people who can contact credit companies on their behalf.

The problems created by debt can have an enormous impact on a person's life. The Assembly needs to create conditions where people should not have to live in poverty and should not have to get credit for the basic necessities of life. Our situation has to change. We must create employment, sustain people's jobs and ensure that they have a reliable household income. No child who is growing up should have to do without, for that affects long-term and life opportunities.

Mr Cree: I congratulate the Minister on moving the Second Stage of the Bill and thank her for it. That is an achievement for her Department. However, I note that Northern Ireland is again the last part of the United Kingdom to have such debt relief provisions introduced. I look forward to a time when we lead the way on such issues, as opposed to playing catch-up with ideas that have been formulated elsewhere.

The Ulster Unionist Party strongly supports this Bill. The Minister's proposals are focused on helping Northern Ireland's poorest — typically, those reliant on benefits or an extremely low income — to repay debts that are well beyond their capabilities to do so. The Bill introduces debt relief orders, similar to those which operate in England and Wales, and allows for the Official Receiver to make a debt relief order that equates to a bankruptcy order issued by the Northern Ireland High Court. A debt relief order will sidestep the need for costly court proceedings, which is the main obstacle faced by those with the lowest incomes to gaining a bankruptcy order.

The fact that we need the Bill is a sad indictment of modern society. Our country has become used to easy credit; it has a buy-now-and-pay-later mentality. Many who in the past would not have had access to credit now have it. Modern consumer society places immense pressures on parents, children and families. In many instances, we have abandoned thousands of families to live in unmanageable debt and under such pressure. The Bill will go some way towards removing some people from such debt, but it does not tackle the root causes of it. Poverty and easy access to credit are the two main reasons why people on very low incomes find themselves in the difficult circumstances that the Bill intends to address.

The Executive have set targets to tackle poverty, but they have not met them and are unlikely to do so. Many commentators identify the collapse of the sub-prime mortgage market in America as the catalyst for the credit crunch and the resulting recession, the effects of which Northern Ireland still feels. The sub-prime mortgage market was based on lending to people on very low incomes who, evidently, could not afford to meet the repayments. In the resultant crash, we in the UK bailed out the bankers and left the poor in poverty. I am not convinced that society or we, its politicians, have addressed the fundamental issues that would render the Bill largely redundant. We need to tackle poverty and change a national economy based on debt. In Northern Ireland, we need to work harder to produce a co-ordinated package of policies that will transform our private sector and make it sustainable and innovative, while giving those who live in deprivation the skills and chances to participate in that transformation. Until we grapple adequately with that issue, our poverty and debt relief policies will, unfortunately, be mollifying as opposed to rectifying.

We must also change the mentality of our country to that of a nation of savers not diehard consumers. However, the Bill will provide much needed relief to thousands of people in Northern Ireland, and I am particularly pleased that it includes provision for DETI to provide advice to the public about debt relief and related matters or to make arrangements for others to do so. I ask the Minister whether that advice will be exclusively reactive, provided exclusively for those already in difficulty, or open to people who are seeking loans etc and are concerned about repayments. Other issues will, no doubt, get closer examination in Committee.

The Ulster Unionist Party will seek assurances that the scheme will not be able to be abused. Concerns were raised during the consultation about the potential negative impact on rate collection and the practices of credit unions. Rate collection and credit unions are examples of practices that are crucial to society and should not be affected negatively by the Bill. The equivalent legislation in England and Wales may be amended because significant numbers of people with modest pensions have been excluded from the scheme. Has the Minister looked into that? The Ulster Unionist Party welcomes the Bill and looks forward to its Committee Stage.

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and

Investment: I am grateful to the Members who considered the Bill and spoke in the debate. I think that it was Mr Moutray who said that the Bill was timely legislation. It is timely, given the increased and pressing need for assistance for many in Northern Ireland.

I thank Alban Maginness, Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment, for his comments about departmental officials, who will continue to engage proactively with the Committee. He said that the Bill was useful because it would free people from a lifetime of the burden of debt. That is absolutely right, and it is one of the Bill's key purposes. The Bill, as the Member rightly said, will affect and its provisions will be available to a small number of people. The Bill came into effect in England and Wales in April 2009, and there were about 12,000 applications up to the end of last year. That equates to between 600 and 700 applications pro rata with the population of Northern Ireland. Nevertheless, it is useful legislation to have available.

DETI works proactively with Department for Social Development (DSD) officials on our respective advice strategies. We are in regular and ongoing contact with our opposite numbers in DSD, because there is no point in wasting government money when we could be adding value to what each Department is doing about debt advice. We will continue to do that.

I thank Mr Moutray for his comments about face-to-face advice. Little did we know the timeliness of the decision to invest in the face-to-face advice service, which has proved hugely beneficial to those who have access to it. I recognise that the pressure on Citizens Advice and Advice NI has been growing over recent months.

Mr F McCann: I apologise for entering the debate late; I was at another meeting.

This is a crucial debate. I am sure that all Members deal with constituents who have fallen badly into debt. Good advice is probably one of the best ways out of debt.

My colleague Jennifer McCann spoke about social fund loans. Many families — probably thousands of them — use the social fund to clothe and feed their kids and to buy them stuff at Christmas. Recently, the Committee for Social Development dealt with the issue, and

the Department has moved to limit the number of times that people can apply for money to deal with those issues.

The other thing is the increase in the number of people who are involved in illegal moneylending and the amount of money being paid to them. There seems to be a vicious circle involving moneylenders and the new rules that stop people from accessing the social fund. Will the Minister take that matter up with the Minister for Social Development? Particularly at the present time, access to the social fund should be relaxed so that people do not have to turn to illegal moneylenders to survive.

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and

Investment: The Member is right: his colleague did mention the social fund, and I made a note to pass on to the Minister for Social Development her comments about using the social fund for everyday events for which the fund was perhaps not originally intended.

I will take up the point about advice. I recently attended the Consumer Council's very effective money week. The Consumer Council must be commended for its work in giving money management advice to people who are in financial difficulties. Last year, the Consumer Council picked Coleraine for its very effective week of events. This year, it was in Fermanagh. I have no idea why it came to Fermanagh this year. Nevertheless, it provided a good week of events, and I am sure that that will continue in future years. This also takes up Mr Cree's point. To ensure that the Department and the Consumer Council do not duplicate what they do, it is important that we join up all the elements of advice. Mr Cree asked whether we would be proactive. It is the Consumer Council's role to be proactive about giving advice, and I think that it does that very effectively.

Ms McCann talked about the practical outworkings of debt, and everyone in the House is aware of the heavy burden that people are under when they get into debt, which is why we must bring the Bill forward. She also referred to the benefits of being involved with a credit union, and the House is aware of how highly I regard the credit union organisations in this country. They will continue to provide a crucial service, and I note the Member's comments about credit union reform.

Mr Cree welcomed the Bill, although he felt that it has come later than the one in England

and Wales. That is right, but he will be aware that, in Northern Ireland, we must go through a particular route to produce an Assembly Act. The consultation on the legislation finished on 6 May 2009, and I circulated a policy memorandum to the Executive on 8 June 2009. On 30 July, the Executive approved the drafting of the Bill, instructions to legislative counsel to draft the Bill were issued on 19 August, and the draft Bill was finalised on 16 December. So the Bill has been moving along, and I know that the Member understands fully the various processes that a Bill has to go through.

Mr Cree was also correct to say that we cannot look at poverty in isolation. There is no point in bringing in a Bill to deal with the consequences of poverty if we do not try to deal with other issues in society, including job creation. We must grow the private sector, and we are aware of the emphasis that the independent review of economic policy put on that.

All in all, the debate was very useful, and I am grateful to the Members who contributed to it. I look forward to the Bill progressing through Committee and coming back to the Assembly, and my officials will work proactively with the Committee.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

*That the Second Stage of the Debt Relief Bill
[NIA 9/09] be agreed.*

11.15 am

Renewables Obligation (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2010

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mrs Foster): I beg to move

That the draft Renewables Obligation (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2010 be approved.

This statutory rule is being made under powers contained in the Energy (Northern Ireland) Order 2003, which prescribes that this Order must be laid in draft for approval by affirmative resolution of the Assembly. The changes that I bring forward in the draft Order were subject to a statutory consultation that closed in December 2009. Following that consultation —
[Interruption.]

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. Sorry, Minister. I ask Members to be seated while the Minister has the Floor.

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Following that consultation, this Order introduces important changes to the Northern Ireland renewables obligation (NIRO) that will continue to make it more effective and capable of delivering our targets for renewable electricity.

Renewable energy is a vital part of our strategy for tackling major policy challenges, including ensuring a supply of secure energy for Northern Ireland; reducing our reliance on volatile, imported fossil fuels by maximising our own sustainable energy resources; and combating climate change. As Northern Ireland's main policy measure for incentivising new renewable electricity generation, it is crucial that the NIRO is as effective as possible. Since its introduction, the NIRO has served its main purpose very successfully, which is to incentivise renewable electricity generation.

In 2005, just 3% of electricity in Northern Ireland was renewably supplied. That figure has trebled and now stands at just under 10%. The NIRO has encouraged and supported private sector investment that has delivered that increase, which has come, primarily, from onshore wind. Therefore, the NIRO is working for Northern Ireland. Last year, following a series of extensive consultations, we introduced banding levels into the NIRO to incentivise renewable generation from a wider range of sources than just onshore wind. That is important. Just as

we do not want all our conventional generation to be supplied from a single fuel, we want to ensure a diversity of renewable supply. That is why, over the past year, my Department has consulted on a cross-departmental bioenergy action plan and on the offshore renewable energy strategic action plan, both of which we will finalise this year.

The changes to the NIRO for this year are designed to ensure that it continues to encourage renewable electricity generation and to deliver on our ambitious target of 40% by 2020, while ensuring that any additional costs to the consumer remain minimal.

I will briefly outline the main amendments to the NIRO introduced by the amendment to this statutory rule. Many of the changes in the draft Renewables Obligation (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2010 will also be made in renewables obligations in Scotland and in England and Wales. Since those obligations work in harmony across the United Kingdom, it is important that all the changes be made together and at the same time. That is a key strength of the market-based mechanism.

The proposed amendments in the Order would extend the end date of the NIRO from 2027 to 2033, giving developers the longer-term certainty needed to incentivise them to continue investing in new electricity generation. However, to avoid compensation and to limit the cost to consumers, support for new stations is being kept to a maximum of 20 years. That will apply to stations that have received full accreditation on or after 26 June 2008 until the 2033 end date. Any additional capacity added to a generation station after 1 April 2010 will also receive 20 years' support up to 2033.

Generating stations that were accredited before 26 June 2008 will continue to receive support until 31 March 2027. That means that a small number of existing generators will not receive the full 20 years' support. However, all those that made investment decisions before 26 June 2008 did so on the basis of a 2027 end date for the NIRO. It is only now that we are extending that end date to 2033.

The draft Renewables Obligation (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2010 includes technical changes, such as the removal of the 20% cap on the size of the obligation, which would have limited the growth of renewable electricity to 20%. The Order also responds to

feedback from the consultation by increasing the level of headroom from 8% to 10% from the 2011-12 obligation period, instead of the gradual increase that was proposed in the consultation. Headroom ensures that there is also more demand for renewables obligation certificates (ROCs) than there is for supply, thus maintaining the market value of ROCs. It also allows a margin between supply and demand for Northern Ireland renewables obligation certificates (NIROCs). In addition, it will help to stabilise the revenue stream for generators, which will mean that developers are better able to source funding for new projects. That is a key issue currently.

Furthermore, we are making other small technical and administrative changes to the Order. We are excluding landfill and sewerage gas from sustainability reporting since we do not believe that there is any value in adding required reports for those sources. We are also setting out the circumstances in which NIROCs can be revoked.

I am pleased to confirm that the Order implements the banding up of landfill gas to meet the unique circumstances of Northern Ireland. Although the UK's landfill gas was banded down to one quarter ROC per megawatt hour last year, we made the argument to Europe successfully that because of the relative lack of development of landfill gas here compared to the rest of the UK, where landfill gas is highly developed, Northern Ireland needed to retain the one-ROC level. State aid clearance for that change was received during 2009, and the one-ROC provision is included in the amendment Order. This is a clear case of the NIRO being adapted to the specific circumstances in Northern Ireland, and my Department was assisted in making that case by clear evidence from industry. I thank the landfill gas industry for the work that it carried out in relation to the evidence that it brought to the Department. Without that evidence, we would not have been able to make the case in respect of state aid clearance.

Many Members will be aware that the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) is introducing a feed-in tariff in GB for small-scale renewable generation up to five megawatts capacity. There was strong support for a similar move here from developers and environmental groups that responded to our consultation. However, as this House is only too aware, there is currently no primary legislation

in place to allow us to introduce a feed-in tariff as an alternative to the NIRO for incentivising small-scale renewable energy generation. The option to include Northern Ireland in the GB legislation did not exist as the feed-in tariff provision was introduced unexpectedly in the House of Lords by DECC at the last minute as an amendment.

In any event, before I seek to introduce similar legislation here, I want to make sure that a small-scale feed-in tariff offers the right means of stimulating renewables generation in Northern Ireland at an acceptable cost to the electricity consumer. We need to take on board both of those arguments. It is not just about whether it will stimulate renewables generation; it has to do so at an acceptable cost to the electricity consumer. We should not lose sight of that.

Members will wish to note that DECC estimates that the cost to consumers of the new feed-in tariff will be £8.6 billion over 20 years. We have to be careful about following policy blindly, and we need to make sure that whatever we put in place will work for Northern Ireland. That is why my Department has commissioned research into the costs of such a scheme here. I intend to make a statement in relation to the feed-in tariff later this year.

It is important to recognise that because Northern Ireland is part of a wider UK mechanism it gets very good value for money from the NIRO. However, I acknowledge that introducing a feed-in tariff in Britain could create a gap between support for small-scale renewables here and elsewhere in the United Kingdom. My Department has looked creatively at how that potential gap can be minimised, which is what led to the proposal in the Order to increase the level of NIROCs for new wind, hydro and solar photovoltaic generating stations that are accredited after 1 April. The enhanced NIROC proposals are designed specifically to ensure that there are broadly similar levels of incentivisation between Northern Ireland and GB in the absence of a feed-in tariff here. The Department is not sitting back; it is trying to fill the gap between us and the rest of GB. If we had not succeeded in bringing forward this enhanced support, we would have rightly been criticised. The House should welcome wholeheartedly what is before it today.

From 1 April, new wind stations producing up to 250 kilowatts and new solar photovoltaic

stations producing up to 50 kilowatts will receive four NIROCs per megawatt hour produced, and hydro stations producing up to one megawatt will receive between two and four NIROCs per megawatt hour, depending on the size of the installation. The introduction of this enhanced support for small-scale generators will go a long way towards bridging any perceived gaps with GB and will provide a real opportunity for small-scale developers, householders and communities to make the move to renewable electricity generation.

I will now turn briefly to the issue of anaerobic digestion (AD). We had a number of responses to the consultation stating that the two ROCs for AD, which was introduced last year, were still insufficient to incentivise the development of AD in Northern Ireland. Unfortunately, the evidence base provided by industry representatives in response to the consultation to date has simply not been strong enough for us to provide sufficient material to support a rapid change of policy in time for this year's NIRO.

I recognise the potential for AD in Northern Ireland, and I understand how it can help to address more than just energy needs in the region. I am very happy to look again at the level of support offered for AD under the NIRO. That is why I am announcing today that the Department will shortly launch a public call for evidence on the costs of AD. We need to get further and compelling evidence on the costs of AD in Northern Ireland, and, if that is brought forward, we will hopefully be able to work in the same way as we did with the landfill gas issue.

I need to see concrete evidence of the costs of AD in order to justify any higher costs to the consumer of increasing support if necessary. The form of the call will be finalised over the next few weeks, but I ask everyone with an interest to provide full evidence on the issue, because it is only with high-quality inputs that we will be able to satisfy ourselves and, more important, Europe, as to whether further support can be justified.

The enhanced NIRO proposals have received significant support during the consultation. However, many Assembly Members and members of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment have been contacted by SWEG, which is a group of small-scale wind developers, who feel that their existing installations would be disadvantaged by the introduction of the enhanced

ROCs for new installations. There are similar groups in GB, and I know that the Committee feels that the group has a case. I have met the group, and I can understand its position. I am sure that Members will have their own views on the issue, but it is important that I spell out why I think it would be wrong to include the group or to commit to include it in the enhanced ROCs. There are several important issues, which I hope that Members will take on board.

First, we must avoid setting dangerous precedents for the future. The NIRO seeks to support the additional costs of renewables. If those costs change significantly or other factors need to be taken into consideration, there is a formal process or review under the legislation. If we set the precedent that existing generations would always benefit from a rise in the banding level, we will undo the downward market pressure and risk consumers in Northern Ireland oversubsidising renewables. We also need to recognise the risk of others saying "Me too". If I were to include SWEG for special treatment, it would raise the expectations of other groups. Existing generations from wind that are currently on a microgeneration rate of two ROCs could also expect a further enhancement, as could those existing generations from other technologies, such as hydro or PV. It could also open the floodgates to much greater costs, while not bringing on any new generation, and that is the key issue. Those costs, which will be borne by electricity consumers, could be as much as an additional £16 million over the next 17 years. That is an additional cost for no new generation: in other words, it is deadweight. We have had many debates in the House in relation to the deadweight issue, and I am sure that Members will recall those debates.

Secondly, we need to consider the wider repercussions at UK level if we were to make an exception for that small group. Indeed, one of the fundamental aims of the changes that we are making is to ensure that the renewables support regime in Northern Ireland is broadly consistent with the arrangements in the rest of the UK. Along with its sister obligations in Scotland, England and Wales, the NIRO will be subject to a full-scale banding review starting in October 2010, which will take effect in 2013. I am not for one moment suggesting that generation using wind power will be banded down at the end of that process, but, if that were the outcome, would the group also want to be included in that change?

Thirdly, we must recognise that ROCs impose costs on consumers. The Assembly has often raised concerns about the high price of energy, fuel poverty and the cost of energy to businesses here, and it would be wrong of me not to consider the wider implications of acceding to the demands of the group. Although the costs of including existing generators, such as the Small Wind Energy Group, may be relatively small in the overall scheme of things, it could mean £16 million of additional subsidy for no additional renewable generation. That would be setting a precedent with the potential to send costs under the NIRO spiralling, with no gain to the people of Northern Ireland. That is not a message that we want to send out.

11.30 am

However, I have asked my officials to continue to liaise with the group of small-scale wind generators in an attempt to understand what the crunch is as far as their figures are concerned. I have left the door open to them, and, perhaps, we will find a way through it that will address my wider concerns and meet the needs of the group. For the reasons that I outlined, I cannot give a commitment that I will definitely raise the ROCs, and I hope that the House will accept the rationale for my decision.

The NIROs are eagerly awaited by people, not least those in the banking institutions, who are poised to invest. They will help to support renewable businesses across Northern Ireland, and if, for any reason, the Order does not go through, we stand to lose significantly more than would be gained by providing further support to SWEG, whose generation accounts for only 0.2% of our renewables capacity.

I acknowledge that those are technical and complex issues. However, the changes before the House today have been well received by the overwhelming majority of those in the renewables industry, and they are keen for them to be introduced as soon as possible. The amendments to the NIRO are essential to the stability of its operation and to the long-term future of renewable electricity in Northern Ireland.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mr A Maginness): I thank the Minister for her comprehensive presentation on the legislation. The Committee generally supports the upward banding for renewable energy generation and the statutory rule. At the end of her speech, the Minister highlighted

some issues with the rule, and I will come to those in due course.

We have a problem with providing clear and rational support for renewable energy in Northern Ireland, and the situation seems rather confused. When the primary legislation was going through Westminster, an opportunity was lost, through no fault of the Minister or the Department, because we did not have the capacity to introduce feed-in tariffs. Feed-in tariffs will revolutionise renewable energy production throughout the UK and could, potentially, do the same for micro-generation in Northern Ireland. I hope that that lost opportunity will be recovered in the future, and I welcome the fact that the Minister adverted to it in her speech. Feed-in tariffs provide a better approach to microgeneration than currently exists.

I also welcome the Minister's statement that she will look again at banding for anaerobic digestion. That is important. Substantial improvements in electricity generation could be made in that area. The Assembly must encourage it. I welcome the Minister's important commitment to look at that seriously with a view to possibly banding up anaerobic digestion.

Although the Committee welcomes the statutory rule, it has difficulty with the aspect of it that relates to small wind generators. The Committee supports the substance of the statutory rule. However, it has expressed serious concerns about how the statutory rule treats existing small wind generators. Effectively, they do not benefit from the banding uplift that relates to production of electricity by new small wind generators.

We have received representations from the Small Wind Energy Group, to which the Minister referred. The group brought its particular difficulties to my attention and that of the Deputy Chairperson, Mr Butler. In effect, existing small wind generators, which produce between 50 and 250 kilowatts of electricity, would continue to receive one renewables obligation certificate for every megawatt hour of electricity that they generate, while those that come into the market after 1 April 2010 will receive four ROCs for each megawatt hour.

The ROC is the main support scheme for renewable electricity projects in Northern Ireland. They currently trade at around £45 each. Electricity suppliers must present one ROC for every 25 megawatts of electricity

supplied from all types of generation. It is important to note that that ensures that suppliers purchase a certain amount of electricity from renewable sources. It is, therefore, in suppliers' interest to purchase from generators who can give them four ROCs for each megawatt that is purchased, rather than those who can give them only one ROC.

One can, therefore, see the distinction that is being made between generators that can produce four ROCs and those that can produce one ROC. That impacts negatively on small wind generators. That is an important point to remember with regard to suppliers. I will come to other points about generators in due course. It is important to remember that suppliers will not look sympathetically on small wind generators given the distinction that is made between one ROC and four ROCs.

The issue impacts on only a small number of assisted generators. Of course, the Minister has, quite properly, identified that. Indeed, she said that their electricity generation represents 0.2% of all generation in Northern Ireland. Therefore, it is a small element in the overall scheme of things. Of course, one could use that to minimise that group's importance. However, on the other hand is the counter-argument that asks why, if that group of generators is so small, the Department is not more sympathetic to it. Although the issue impacts on only a small number of existing generators, those generators will receive only one quarter of the support that will be available to new generators.

The Committee considered the Renewables Obligation (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2010 at SL1 stage at its meeting on 21 January 2010. It also considered a departmental paper, 'Outcome from the Statutory Consultation on the Renewables Obligation Order 2010'. The Small Wind Energy Group provided evidence to the Committee that at least seven respondents to the Department's statutory consultation highlighted concern about a two-tier system. However, the Department's summary of consultation responses failed to inform the Committee that the issue was raised during the consultation. Therefore, when the Committee considered the policy at SL1 stage, it had not received all the relevant and important facts.

Had the Committee been informed at SL1 stage of the issues that had been raised by the Small Wind Energy Group, its attitude towards

the statutory rule might have been different. When the Committee first became aware of the issue at its meeting on 18 March, the NIRO was already at statutory rule stage, so at that point the Committee was already committed and could do nothing about the situation, despite the fact that that serious problem, albeit involving a small group of people, became apparent only at that Committee meeting. The Committee was bound to its previous decision and could do nothing about it.

The Committee could say to the House today that the Assembly should not support the draft Order, but that would be grossly irresponsible. At an earlier stage, the Committee could, perhaps, have persuaded the Department to take a fresh look at the situation in relation to small wind generators, but it did not have the opportunity to do so because it had not received the information.

We know from the available correspondence that the Department was in discussion with that group of generators, and had been for several weeks, but that fact was not brought to the attention of the Committee. It is unacceptable that the Committee was kept in the dark about an issue of considerable concern to a number of affected individuals. Once again, I accept that it is a very small group of people, but it should also be emphasised that it is a pioneering group of people. Those people used their own money to set up small wind generation, without government support, in their different areas. They did that because they felt that it was an enterprise that was worth engaging in, not simply from a commercial point of view but through a commitment to creating and building up a renewable energy industry in Northern Ireland. The group should be commended for that, and it should not be disadvantaged because it is a small group or because it is pioneering.

The Department's policy on SWEG seems somewhat confused. In a letter to the group dated 8 February 2010, DETI raised the issue of overcompensation, stating that the issue would be of concern to the European Commission.

However, the Department openly admitted that it did not ask the European Commission to consider grant aid for the group. The Minister referred to "oversubsidisation", which must mean the same as "overcompensation". It seems strange for the Department to say that overcompensation is an issue yet not approach

the Commission to seek clarification. It is important to remember that.

11.45 am

SWEG informed me that it approached the European Commission informally and was told that the issue of overcompensation did not arise. I cannot say whether that is factually correct. It may be the case that the European Commission does have an overcompensation issue with SWEG. Nevertheless, SWEG took the view that such an issue did not arise, and we have heard nothing to the contrary from the Department on even the European Commission's informal view.

In a letter dated 24 February, the Department agreed to consider with Ofgem the possibility of SWEG members repowering wind turbines to enable them to benefit from the enhanced ROCs from 1 April 2010. To do that would involve SWEG members taking the turbines that they currently have, rejigging them and presenting them as new generators. I do not know whether that is possible, but there appeared to be some discussion on that. There also seemed to be a number of consequential complications, so the idea may not be a runner. However, at least the Department was considering the option with SWEG.

On 26 February, DETI wrote again to SWEG to say that Ofgem would do as instructed, but that any benefits could come about only as a result of changes to the NIRO. I believe that the Department can do something through the swift introduction of an amending statutory rule, and I hope that it will do that. The merits are on the side of the small wind generators. If existing wind generators want to receive the four ROCs that are available after 1 April, the only course of action open to them now seems to be to dismantle the existing wind turbines and relocate them to an alternative site as new generation turbines. However, that seems to be a pretty drastic option. It appears unfair and disadvantageous to existing generators if, for example, someone in a neighbouring field can set up a turbine and gain benefit from it over and above the benefit that existing generators can obtain. That does not seem fair.

The Department's argument is that its policy is to encourage new renewable generation, but if an existing generator adds additional capacity after 1 April, that is not considered new

generation, and thus it does not benefit from enhanced ROCs.

Last week, departmental officials told the Committee that the NIRO is to encourage new development. However, neither this Order nor previous legislation specifies new development. Rather, the explanatory memorandum to the Renewables Obligation Order (Northern Ireland) 2005 states that the aim of the NIRO is to encourage the development of electricity generation and capacity using renewable sources. Therefore, the purpose of the NIRO is not only to encourage new developments, but to sustain existing projects. That has been demonstrated in previous changes to the NIRO, which have provided for enhanced support for all existing projects, as well as new projects.

The NIRO was originally intended to address the generation of electricity using renewable sources; it does not state that that had to mean new development. That is what the departmental officials told us in Committee. To be fair to the Minister, she did not use exactly the same words today as were used by the departmental officials in Committee.

The important element that I want to emphasise to the Minister and the Department is the encouragement of generating capacity. If this Order does damage to existing generators, disadvantages them and does not sustain them, surely it is acting contrary to the aims of the NIRO, which was clearly aimed at encouraging generation from renewable sources. It is not only about getting new generators into the market; it is about sustaining existing generation. I emphasise that point to the Minister. If the effect of the legislation is to put existing generators out of business, or to place them in a position in which they are no longer able to continue, or are so disadvantaged that they decide to give up, what is the point of the statutory rule as far as that group of people is concerned? There are very strong arguments in respect of that small group of generators.

It seems that, rather than investing in additional capacity, or maintaining existing facilities, that small group of generators would be better off investing in entirely new facilities. It is clear to the Committee that the policy discriminates between new and existing generators. The question is whether it discriminates against one particular group; one has to come to the conclusion that it does. I ask the Minister to

consider carefully the situation of the small wind-power generators with a view to giving them the same benefits and entitlements as other generators that come into the market after April 2010.

It is important that the Minister looks at that. She said in her speech that the door is still open, and, indeed, departmental officials said the same to the Committee. However, the Committee's questioning of those officials showed that the Department seems to have a bottom line from which it will not move. I hope that the Minister will show greater sympathy and flexibility.

I neither agree nor believe that the draft Order will fundamentally affect our relationship with other areas of the UK. The Minister said that her Department's policy is intended to make our arrangements broadly consistent with those in the rest of the UK. That does not mean that our arrangements have to be identical to those in the rest of the UK. Therefore, there is plenty of room for the Minister and the Department to be flexible on the issue. I hope, and I think that the Committee is in general agreement —

Mr Shannon: Will the Member give way?

The Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment: I will in a moment. I hope that, in the near future, the Minister and the Department will come back to the Committee with an amendment to this statutory rule so that that injustice to that small group of generators can be remedied.

Mr Shannon: Does the Member agree that members of the Small Wind Energy Group in Northern Ireland are being disadvantaged in comparison with members on the UK mainland? If they are, that must also be settled.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment: I appreciate that point. We have our own regime here, and the Minister quite rightly said that it should be broadly consistent with that in the rest of the UK. I am saying that our regime does not have to be identical to that in Britain, but they should be broadly consistent. Indeed, at the beginning of my speech, I talked about feed-in tariffs in the UK. Those are a good idea, and they would provide a greater incentive. That is a substantial difference between what happens here and in the rest of the UK, and I hope that that can be remedied in the near future. Feed-in tariffs are used across Europe, as well as in the UK

and the Republic of Ireland, and we should be consistent with the rest of Europe in their use.

Mr Moutray: I support the motion, and I commend the Minister for introducing the draft Renewables Obligation (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2010. Given the positive impact that the draft Order will have on renewable energy in Northern Ireland, I urge all Members to support it. This is a good news story for the Department, and it demonstrates the Department's commitment to the renewables obligation and the benefits that that can bring to all the people who live in the Province.

I welcome the changes that the draft Order proposes, as well as the fact that such changes will continue to make our renewables obligation more effective. Furthermore, the draft Order will assist in delivering our targets for renewable energy, and it will secure an energy supply for Northern Ireland while decreasing our reliance on volatile imported fuels. In addition, it will foster new developments in that area.

NIRO has been successful since its introduction in 2005. However, it is important to make NIRO as effective as possible, so I welcome the changes that are proposed to further enhance the current percentage of renewable electricity in Northern Ireland. Ultimately, the changes that are outlined will go some way in helping us to achieve and deliver our target of 40% renewable electricity by 2020. Furthermore, the draft Order will assist us in aligning our system with those in England, Scotland and Wales in that regard, and it will allow us to make changes, together with our counterparts, given the fact that the renewables obligations work in harmony throughout the United Kingdom.

I particularly welcome the extension of the end date from 2027 to 2033. That gives long-term sureness and incentive to new and existing organisations to continue investing in new renewable energy generation in Northern Ireland. Additionally, I welcome the banding up of landfill gas to meet the unique circumstances of Northern Ireland, and I commend the Minister on her negotiations with Europe in that regard. I welcome the fact that we were able to retain the one ROC level unlike the rest of the United Kingdom, where it was banded down.

12.00 noon

It would be remiss of me not to mention the widespread consultation process that the

Minister carried out. I am satisfied with the Minister's efforts and response concerning the number of smaller organisations, particularly those represented by SWEG, which made representations to the Department and, indeed, many MLAs. I believe that Minister Foster has taken an informed and educated decision for all concerned. Although I empathise with those who made representations, I believe that the Minister has today given the representatives of SWEG a public undertaking to continue to liaise with that group and to try to work with them where possible.

I am content with the proposals on the table today. However, it is important to again highlight anaerobic digestion. That has the potential to provide further renewable energy opportunities, but, to date, it has not been maximised. Therefore, I ask the Minister to continue with her efforts in that area and to work with the relevant persons in order to have that included in future NIRO proposals.

The vast majority of organisations wish to see the proposals that are before us today implemented as soon as possible. The proposals will further incentivise renewable energy generation, on which Northern Ireland's long-term future renewable electricity depends. We have witnessed a joined-up approach to the issue, given that Minister Poots has been instrumental in implementing the new planning policy for renewable energy, PPS 18, which is designed to assist the growth of the overall renewable sector, and that Minister Foster is now bringing forth the changes to NIRO. That demonstrates that the Executive are working.

Mr Butler: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I hope that the Minister knows that the Committee supports this legislation on renewables. I will address what the Chair of the Committee said about the Small Wind Energy Group in a moment.

The legislation is to be welcomed, especially the new accreditation criteria for four ROCs. That measure will go a long way towards helping us to derive 40% of our electricity from renewable sources by 2020. The Committee, therefore, broadly welcomes the legislation. However, it had some concerns about SWEG.

I know that the Minister intends to address the fact that there are different systems in place for feed-in tariffs and ROCs in Britain, the South of Ireland and throughout Europe. She said in

her speech that feed-in tariffs and ROCs are complicated matters for all of us to get our heads around. It would be beneficial to have one system operating throughout these islands. The single energy market operates between the North and South as well as in Britain during peak times. The Committee hopes that more and more people will be incentivised to obtain four ROCs and that that will consequently create jobs in the renewable energy sector.

The Chair of the Committee outlined the concerns that the Small Wind Energy Group raised. It was unfortunate that last week's Committee meeting was dominated by departmental officials trying to explain why that group had been treated in the way in which it was. As the Chairperson, Alban Maginness, said, conflicting signals seem to be coming from the Department as to why that group was treated in such a way. That is no reflection on individual officials, and we want to work with the Department and its officials. However, even at last week's Committee meeting, some of the explanations given by officials were confusing. It is not clear why the Small Wind Energy Group was dealt with in the way that it was. Alban Maginness also mentioned state aid rules and overcompensation. In some of the letters it says that the Department will try to address those concerns. However, it is unfortunate that this all came to the Committee at a late stage in the consultation process.

We want to encourage more and more people to get involved in the renewable energy industry and to take up the offer of four ROCs. However, as the Chairperson said, SWEG is a pioneering group that was involved in the industry long before anybody else was interested. The group now feels, justifiably to some degree, that it is being discriminated against by the Department.

Mr Spratt: The Member is speaking in support of renewable energy. Therefore, will he support the North/South interconnector, which is vital for renewable energy?

Mr Butler: We will support the interconnector. What the Member is getting at is whether it should be underground or overhead, which is an ongoing debate. However, we support the single energy market.

Mr Boylan: The real issue is that we are bringing forward legislation, and a pioneering group, which started the whole process, has fallen outside it. The Member will agree that there

should be a level playing field. I hope that the Minister will commit herself today to ensuring that there is a level playing field for SWEG. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr Butler: I thank the Member for that comment. However, I do not want to get into a debate about whether the interconnector should be underground or overground.

Although we have concerns about the Small Wind Energy Group, we broadly welcome the legislation. To be fair, I believe that the Minister will try to address some of those issues. I know from some of the correspondence that her officials will be going back to SWEG. Perhaps the Committee Chairperson's suggestion that there should be further legislation down the line to address the issue is a way round it.

The message of the day is that we welcome the legislation. Hopefully, the Minister and her officials will deal with the Small Wind Energy Group and with the longer-term issues of feed-in tariffs and ROCs. After today's debate, I hope that more and more people will be able to take up the offer of four ROCs and get involved in the renewable energy industry.

Mr Cree: It is going to be one of those mornings.

There is much merit in the changes that the Minister has proposed to the renewables obligation. As part of the UK's commitment to meet the EU renewable energy directive, we have played our part through the introduction, in 2005, of the renewables obligation. Subsequently, we have seen a significant increase in the development of renewable electricity generation and supply here. For Northern Ireland, renewable energy development is a win-win situation. We are currently far too reliant on imported fossil fuels for our energy production. That leaves us open to energy insecurity and to fluctuations in oil prices, which, at the present time, are in danger of crippling our fledgling economic recovery. A significant increase in the use of renewable energy production and supply would give us extra stability and, at the same time, benefit the environment and help to tackle climate change.

There are aspects of the Order that the Ulster Unionist Party warmly welcomes. Extending the life of the Renewables Obligation Order (Northern Ireland) 2009 from 2027 to 2033 is welcome, although the period is not quite long enough. Removing the 20% ceiling on the NIRO

level is also welcome, as is the commitment to increase the level of headroom from 8% to 10%, which, although a little late, will give the scheme the stability it requires to benefit the supply and distribution ends of the business.

The Enterprise, Trade and Investment Committee was happy to support the Renewables Obligation (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2010 when presented with it by the Department. However, subsequent to that approval being given, several issues have been raised with the Committee, to which the Chairperson has already referred. The primary concern was with the proposed interim solution to support a limited amount of small-scale generation, in line with support offered under the proposed GB feed-in tariffs. It appears that, in the absence of the power to introduce feed-in tariffs in Northern Ireland, we will have an ill-thought-out mesh of ideas, which, in reality, will not help the Executive reach their overall aim of increasing renewable energy production. The feed-in tariff in Great Britain was based on a comprehensive study of small-scale renewable energy. Such a study has not been carried out in Northern Ireland by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, and, subsequently, the Minister is about to introduce a completely inappropriate system. Furthermore, feed-in tariffs are contracts designed for small-scale energy producers, while renewables obligation certificates are intended for use by larger organisations.

The Minister is also intending to use the ROC system to do the job of the feed-in tariffs in promoting the start-up of small-scale energy producers. The crux of the problem was raised by generators of small-scale energy from wind power in Northern Ireland who currently avail of the ROC system. As has been referred to by other Members during the debate, such people, who invested their own capital, currently benefit from a one-ROC status. However, under the enhanced ROC system, all new generators of small-scale energy from wind power will benefit from a four-ROC status, placing those who already produce renewable energy from that source at a distinct disadvantage to their counterparts who are just starting out. That makes no sense, and it will lead to people either dropping out of production or closing existing turbines and opening new ones to avail of the economic benefits of the four-ROC system. In light of the absence of a study of small-scale renewable energy, how can we trust the enhanced ROC status proposed by the Minister?

It was brought to the Committee's attention that the ROC status for biogas in Northern Ireland is the second lowest in Europe, a point also raised by previous contributors to the debate. That is a devastating blow to that fledgling industry. Northern Ireland will not be immune to potential gas shortages in the future, and the rest of Europe is moving ahead full throttle with that technology, with 1,200 biogas plants being constructed each year. The Minister's decision today has the potential to kill off that industry in Northern Ireland before it has even got off the ground. However, I accept that she is prepared to examine the issue again.

The enhanced ROC aspect of the Renewables Obligation (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2010 is deeply flawed. The Minister must return to the drawing board and examine the issue comprehensively. She must take into consideration the status of our small-scale renewables sector and how it can compete internally and with development in the rest of the UK, Europe and beyond. Currently, the Minister and the Department are displaying what can only be described as inadequate thinking on the matter.

On many occasions, Northern Ireland has been left behind other regions of the UK and Europe on the green economy. That cannot be allowed to happen on such an important issue for our environment, economy and energy security.

That said, the UUP is pleased to support the Order. I reiterate what the Chairman of the Committee has said in that the proposed Order may require an amending Order to correct the imbalance, which is set to destabilise the entire project.

Mr Neeson: I welcome the Minister's comments. This is important legislation, and in the present economic climate the importance of renewable energy has become ever more significant. For a considerable time, the Alliance Party has been a strong advocate of the development of the green economy, but, like other members of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment, I do not believe that the Order goes far enough, as several projects have been left out of the loop.

12.15 pm

I am not just talking about the Small Wind Energy Group; I advocate an urgent review of the terms of the renewables obligation. Nevertheless, I support the motion.

It is worthwhile pointing out that, in recent correspondence, SWEG wrote that the purpose of the NIRO is not only to encourage new developments but to sustain existing projects. That has been the case in previous changes to the NIRO.

The NIRO places a legal requirement on electricity suppliers to get a specified and increasing proportion of their electricity from renewable energy sources and to be able to account for that. The suppliers must pay a buy-out fee proportionate to any shortfall.

Yesterday, along with other members of the DETI Committee, I met representatives of the single electricity market operator, and I am pleased to say that electricity generated by renewables forms part of the grid. The NIRO operates in tandem with two similar obligations in Great Britain: the RO in England and Wales and the ROS in Scotland.

The development of renewable energy has always been of considerable interest to the Enterprise, Trade and Investment Committee, and it is proposed that we visit one major project when the Committee pays a working visit to Brussels in the near future. It is important that we look beyond electricity generated by wind power, although that is an important source of electricity. The development of tidal power in Strangford Lough has already attracted considerable interest from other parts of the UK, and there are other significant opportunities to develop similar projects around the coast of Northern Ireland.

I am particularly disappointed that Belfast City Council recently thwarted the development of an energy-from-waste facility at the north foreshore, even though there was public support for the project. The development of energy from waste is a major part of our future.

I support the motion. I hope that we meet our renewables obligation target to get 40% of our energy from renewables by 2020.

Mr Shannon: I support the motion. The renewables obligation is probably something that is close to us all. For me, the previous Member who spoke and other Members who referred to it, the sea turbine on Strangford Lough is an example of what can and should be done.

There is a clear obligation on us, as a member of the EU, to ensure that we generate some of

our power supplies through renewable energy. That is something that we should do practically and physically as Assembly Members and in any other way that we can. We should also generate renewable energy at home when the opportunity arises.

We need as much independence and as little reliance on fossil fuels as possible, especially considering the price of oil and gas. Every Member is contacted daily by constituents about the prices of oil, fuel and electricity. This last while, I have heard specific concerns from constituents about the price of electricity. Therefore, we can see what areas we need to address to make the situation better. That is what the renewables obligation is about, and I fully support it.

I declare an interest as a member of Ards Borough Council. As a member of the council, I attended a conference on offshore renewable energy to ascertain how the council and the Strangford constituency could meet the targets that have been set. I was impressed by the conference, which was organised by DETI. One issue is clear: there must be protection of the interests of fishermen. We must ensure that any plans for offshore renewable energy do not further decrease fishing locations and put the fishing industry under even more pressure. I have put a number of questions to the Minister, and she has responded in a very positive fashion.

The proposals could mean that up to 300 wind turbines are in place along the coast of the Irish Sea. Many people would consider that to be good news, but there must be protection for wildlife and for the livelihood of fishermen. We must achieve a balance and ensure that we meet the target for renewable energy while enabling fishing to continue. The two elements must coexist.

We need to consider factors such as habitat extinction, fishing boats not being allowed near offshore wind turbines because of collision risks and the noise that 300 wind turbines would generate. We need to keep those facts and figures to the front of our minds when we consider renewables legislation. A target has been set for the Province to generate 40% of its electricity through renewable energy by 2020. However, location is important, and, as I said, there must be coexistence and co-operation to allow everyone to support the goals that must

be achieved. It is important that everyone is on board and supports the legislation.

We cannot allow fishing fleets to be displaced, but they can coexist. The mussels and shellfish beds off the coast of the Copeland Islands are examples of important habitats. That area is in tidal zone 4 of the strategic environmental assessment. The Narrows at Portaferry, which are in tidal zone 5, are in the Ards Borough Council area, and many other areas throughout the Province can and will provide the energy that we need to meet the targets.

There are benefits to the economy. It has been suggested — I am not sure whether it has been confirmed — that as many as 10 jobs could be created at every wind farm unit. It is important to make those jobs available to the people who live in the area. I mean no disrespect to anybody who lives outside the areas in which the wind farms are or could be located, but it is important that the people who live nearby take up those jobs. I am interested in how that will work out.

In other parts of the UK, renewable energy has been approved, and there are examples of how it has coexisted with other industries and the effect that it has had. Some of those examples from the mainland could be used in Northern Ireland. We must meet the targets for renewable energy, but we must also preserve the viability of the fishing industry. That is the challenge for 2020. It is a challenge for the councils, and Ards Borough Council in particular will play an important role in delivery. Location and coexistence are the key factors.

The conference was informative and comprehensive and gave us an insight into the future of offshore renewable energy, which is bright as long as we ensure that protection is offered to those who need it. I have every faith that the Minister will ensure that the legislation offers such protections. We must do all in our power to meet the targets and to enhance the viability of our fishing industry. I support the legislation.

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and

Investment: I thank all those who contributed to the debate. It is good to air those issues, and I welcome the debate.

The Committee Chairperson opened today's debate. He outlined that the Committee generally supports the legislation, after which he talked about SWEG. Before I address that

point, I will deal with a couple of other issues, namely the allegation from the Chairperson and from Committee member Mr Cree that there is no coherent strategy or consistent approach to the NIRO. Mr Butler said that it was rather confusing to listen to some officials talk about the strategy. I entirely refute those allegations.

The NIRO has been extremely successful in progressing renewables generation in Northern Ireland. Members quoted figures, and Mr Cree said that we have moved from 3% to 10%. That increase speaks for itself. Mr Cree said that the NIRO is a completely inappropriate system that does nothing and is not appropriate for small wind generation. That is simply not true. We currently have 1,140 small-scale generators here. SWEG represents seven of those generators, and the balance clearly shows that the NIRO is working well. Moreover, Mr Cree said that we should have done nothing with the NIRO and should have waited until we moved into the situation with the feed-in tariff. That is nonsense: we are telling the industry that we want to help it and to give it an incentive to move into that area.

We had the option of waiting for the feed-in tariff (FIT) legislation. Whether we will have that legislation depends on the consultation responses. If we had done nothing, the industry would not have been too pleased with us. It has been waiting for the banding up of the alternative types of generation, and the legislation provides for that. I am disappointed by some of the comments that were made on that subject during the debate.

The changes to the NIRO were made after full and frequent consultation. As members of the Committee should know, the new strategic energy framework (SEF) has a particular focus on renewables. It sets an ambitious target of achieving 40% renewable electricity by 2020. That target has been consulted on extensively, and the Committee has been fully briefed on the SEF.

The Chairperson of the Committee, Mr Maginness, said that FIT was much better and referred to that as a lost opportunity. It would not have been my choice to make a last-minute amendment to the legislation in the House of Lords that excluded Northern Ireland from the FIT. That was a poor decision, and we would like to have been part of a wider consultation, but that did not happen. It is important that the House realises that the cost of the NIRO

is spread across consumers in the United Kingdom and that we benefit from that. If we were to have our own FIT in Northern Ireland, the cost would be borne only by Northern Ireland consumers. We will have to take that into consideration when we determine whether FIT is appropriate for Northern Ireland in the future. At present, we get the benefits of FIT at a lower cost. None of the members of the Small Wind Energy Group would receive funding under FIT were it to be put in place, because they have already passed the post for any such application.

The call for evidence that I will make on anaerobic digesters has been welcomed. If we are to make a case to Europe for landfill gas generation, we must have all the evidence to hand. That is true of anaerobic digestion and SWEG. In my opening remarks, I said that the door was open to working with SWEG. I will not close that door, but I want to take issue with some of the comments that Members made in the debate.

It is correct to say that the NIRO is meant to incentivise new forms of generation. However, Alban Maginness said that that should not be the case and that it should also sustain existing development. It is important to note that the members of SWEG are being sustained at the rate at which they made their investment decision. No support is being taken away from them.

I mentioned the issue of cost in my opening remarks. It is unfortunate that certain Members did not address that issue. No Member who spoke in support of SWEG mentioned the costs to consumers that would be incurred should we decide to go down the road that they advocate. We must seek to minimise the costs to consumers and avoid overcompensating the developers. We were given one side of the story, and it is disappointing that there was no balance to address the issue of costs.

The developers in SWEG made a business decision, and I commend them. I do not wish to take away from the fact that they were pioneers, but Members must reflect on why that decision was taken at that time. They saw an opportunity and made a decision that was not based solely on altruism. Let us be clear about that. During the debate, some Members said that SWEG did not get any help at that point, but it did. It got one ROC, which was the available rate at the time. SWEG made its own investment

calculations and, as a group of businessmen, concluded that it was a good proposition. That is why the NIRO was good for incentivising at that time.

Over the past three years, we have had the long process of introducing banding. I should say that, in that time, the group had every opportunity to raise concerns. It could have told us that one ROC was not enough for a small-scale wind generator, but it did not do so. We are now being told that it will be disadvantaged because other people may get four ROCs from April 2010.

12.30 pm

The Committee Chairperson raised the issue of suppliers, and I also want to discuss that matter. It is true that existing renewable installations will already have contracts with suppliers for their ROCs. Therefore, given that most if not all of the existing owners are already contracted to NIE, the fact that other developers will have four ROCs for each megawatt hour to sell will not make it harder for the owners to sell their electricity. That business is highly regulated. Therefore, I think that the point about supply has been answered.

The group is not getting any fewer ROCs than it did last year; it is getting the same number. The group was aware of the value of ROCs and the fact that they may vary over the terms of the investment. As I said, if we had not tried to ensure that the wider Northern Ireland renewables community was not disadvantaged by the absence of a FIT or if we had sat back and waited until a FIT was introduced, everybody in Northern Ireland would have been disadvantaged. Others in GB would have upgraded their ROCs, and we would have been left behind. That is not a position that we in Northern Ireland should have been in.

The Committee Chairperson also raised the issue of repowering. The SWEG recently asked DETI to look at repowering as a possible avenue for receiving extra ROCs. The officials believe that something could be done about that. Again, however, we need to consider all the possible consequences, and we want to discuss the matter with the group to see whether anything can be done. That applies not just to wind technology; other technologies, such as landfill gas, will be affected. We wanted to move ahead, because we wanted to have the NIRO in place for 1 April. That would put us on a level playing

field with the rest of GB. We do not want to be left behind or have the industry penalised because we did not move ahead.

The Chairperson of the Committee for

Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The Minister said that the door is open for discussions with the SWEG, but she has adopted a position that strikes me as being fairly hard line, to put it colloquially. Is there any point in discussions taking place between the Department and the group if, in her mind or in that of the Department, the door is effectively closed already? Will the Minister clarify her position on the nature of any discussions that she or her Department would have with the group?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and

Investment: We have told the group clearly that we want to continue to speak to it, not least about the issue that I am about to address: overcompensation. The Member rightly said that that issue was not mentioned at European level, so I want to explain why that was the case. We were concerned that raising that matter with the Commission would delay the whole state aid approval, which has been in motion since October 2009. We recently heard, although not officially, that the state aid approval has gone through for the other proposals that we submitted. However, we know from experience that the issue of overcompensation — in other words, support exceeding the level that is necessary to make a project viable — is important to the Commission. Indeed, it has recently pushed back on a number of issues that relate to overcompensation.

I made a call today for evidence on anaerobic digestion. I make the same call to the SWEG. If it has any further evidence that we can use to argue the case to the Commission, I am more than happy to take it. I must say that I think that it will be a difficult case to make, but we will make it if the SWEG brings that evidence. We will continue to discuss repowering with the members of the SWEG.

The final point that the Chairperson made was to ask why the Committee was not informed of the SWEG's concern. The SWEG raised two main issues at the time of the SL1. Those were the lack of 20-year support and enhanced ROCs. The SL1, if I am correct in saying, flagged up the 20-year issue, because a wider group than SWEG alone raised it. We received more than 90 responses to the consultation, seven of

which, as the Member said, mentioned both issues. I am happy to examine why the issue of enhanced ROCs was not flagged up, but I think that the Member will accept that we flagged up the 20-year issue.

It is unreasonable to suggest that SWEG members made an investment in the confident expectation that the level of ROCs would rise. The NIRO is a market-based mechanism designed to reward renewables generation over a longer term. As Members will know, the ROC value may vary over that term, and, indeed, it has varied.

The Order will introduce significant changes to the NIRO. The NIRO has delivered to date, and, as I hope I have indicated, it has brought us substantial increases in renewable energies. I want it to become even more effective. The measures that have been proposed today, particularly the enhanced NIROCs, will help to generate greater levels of electricity from a wider range of renewable sources.

Mr Neeson talked about the need for a mix of renewables, a case that Mr Cree and Mr Butler also made. Mr Shannon would want me to mention the absolutely marvellous Marine Current Turbines (MCT) in Strangford Lough, even though he is not here to hear me do that. We are very proud of MCT, and I was pleased to hear it talked about at yesterday's British-Irish Council meeting on energy matters as an exemplar for other countries to follow.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Did the Minister go on board?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Yes. I was on board the turbine when I was the Minister of the Environment.

I accept Mr Shannon's point about the need for coexistence and co-operation and to protect wildlife and fisheries. Indeed, the forthcoming marine Bill, on which the Minister of the Environment will lead, will take those points on board.

I hope that the legislation that has been proposed today will contribute to the further development of Northern Ireland's renewables sector and help to support the higher levels of renewable electricity that are needed to reduce the sector's carbon emissions and secure our energy supply. I commend the motion to the Assembly.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the draft Renewables Obligation (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2010 be approved.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has arranged to meet immediately on the lunchtime suspension. I propose, therefore, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until 2.00 pm.

The sitting was suspended at 12.38 pm.

On resuming (Mr Speaker in the Chair) —

2.00 pm

Executive Committee Business

Budget (No. 2) Bill: Final Stage

**The Minister of Finance and Personnel
(Mr S Wilson):** I beg to move

That the Budget (No. 2) Bill [NIA 11/09] do now pass.

We are now on the third round of the passage of this Bill, and I hope that the debate will go smoothly. As the Assembly reaches the Final Stage of the Budget —

Oh dear. *[Laughter.]* Just when I thought I was going to escape, the Member for North Belfast has arrived in the Chamber. We could be in for a long debate.

As the Budget (No. 2) Bill begins its Final Stage — I emphasise that it is the Final Stage — I wish to record my thanks to the Committee for Finance and Personnel for agreeing that the Bill be granted accelerated passage. I am thankful that the Committee and other Members of the House appreciated that accelerated passage was necessary for logistical reasons to ensure a seamless flow of cash and resources on devolution day to the Department of Justice, the Public Prosecution Service (PPS) and for additional services provided by the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) for 2010-11.

I thank all the Members for their contributions during yesterday's interesting debates on the Supply resolution and the Second Stage of the Bill. I look forward to their contributions, albeit shortened, I hope, to this debate.

As I have stated, the Budget (No. 2) Bill is an essential step in ensuring that, once policing and justice is devolved to Northern Ireland on 12 April, the necessary cash and resources will be available to the Department of Justice, the Public Prosecution Service and OFMDFM for expenditure arising from the discharging of their responsibilities for those matters. For the first time in 38 years, a locally elected Justice Minister, as a member of the Northern Ireland Executive, will set out the priorities and plans for those matters. In future, the Assembly will

be able to hold the Department of Justice and the Public Prosecution Service accountable for managing and controlling cash and resources for the delivery of policing and justice services to the people of Northern Ireland.

I look forward to Members' support in ensuring that the Bill clears its Final Stage, and I commend the Bill to the House.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel (Ms J McCann): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. As I said during a previous debate on the Bill, the Committee for Finance and Personnel is aware of the consequences for the transfer of policing and justice powers to the Assembly should the Bill not pass before the Easter recess. Against that background, the Committee was content that the Bill proceed with accelerated passage.

In advance of its deliberations on the Bill, and on the issue of accelerated passage, the Committee received relevant papers from the Assembly and Executive Review Committee on its examination of the financial aspects of devolving policing and justice powers. As I said during yesterday's debate on the Bill, the Committee also took evidence from Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) officials on 10 March. During that meeting, Members probed a number of areas, which included why DFP had not engaged with the Committee on the issue at an earlier stage; the extent to which DFP scrutinised the estimates and issues arising from the approval process; the detailed breakdown of the baseline figures for the Department of Justice and the Public Prosecution Service; the assurances on the process that was followed for negotiating transfers between the NIO and the Department of Justice; the future relationship among DFP, the Department of Justice and the Public Prosecution Service; any potential areas for reform and efficiency savings; and the extent to which elements of the additional financial package are reflected in the estimates contained in the Bill.

The Committee is keen to see effective scrutiny of the expenditure of the Department of Justice and the Public Prosecution Service through the Committee for Justice and the usual channels in DFP. I support the motion.

Mr A Maginness: There is a lot to be said in relation to this Bill, but you will be pleased to know that I am not going to say an awful lot.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: Hear, hear.

Mr A Maginness: I say that for the ease of the Minister who very patiently sat through the debate yesterday. However, as I told the House, yesterday was a good day for the Assembly and the people of Northern Ireland. The addition of justice and policing powers will transform the Assembly into a much greater and stronger institution that is more relevant to the people. The SDLP supports the Bill and wishes it a fair passage.

The debate provided an opportunity for parties and Members to identify their concerns about justice and policing issues. The Minister faces an invidious task in replying to some concerns because not all the issues raised were germane to financial matters. Nonetheless, finance underlies everything. Without the proper finance for the legal institutions, they would not operate properly. Therefore, it is important that we get that right.

I am heartened by the huge budget of almost £1.5 billion. That is an extraordinary amount of money, but I hope that we will spend it wisely and well over the next year. I am heartened, too, that although the budget is for the next year, there will be an opportunity, if necessary, to amend it. That is right and proper.

We must ensure that the Department of Justice becomes fully integrated into the Administration. It should not be regarded as being set aside from the other Departments, or as direct rule in drag. It must be part and parcel of the Administration, and the Minister of Justice must play a full and integral role in the Executive. In addition, the civil servants who form part of that Department must realise that they serve a local Administration and represent the interests of local people. No longer are they the servants of a direct rule Minister.

On the foot of the creation of the Department, it will be up to the Minister of Justice, along with Executive colleagues, to bring forward an addendum to the Programme for Government. Thus the new Minister will bring fresh thinking to justice and policing. The bedding down of the Department will be an enormous and lengthy task. Fortunately, however, a substantial amount of money accompanies the transfer of policing and justice powers.

Yesterday, the Minister identified at least two issues that could have destabilised a smooth transition. The first was pensions for police officers, and it is right that they should receive their proper entitlement. The changes implemented as a consequence of Patten have, to some extent, inflated the amount to which police officers are entitled. Nonetheless, it is an important achievement because by allowing an issue such as pensions to irritate the policing body, policing in Northern Ireland could be destabilised. The issue has been addressed properly.

Legal aid is the second issue that I wish to raise. Yesterday, the Minister pointed out a shortfall. Although Mr Attwood disputed the figures, for the time being, the issue is being addressed. As I said yesterday, we must look afresh at legal aid and learn from the mistakes that were made in Britain. To afford as many people as possible in our community proper access to justice, we must apply new and fresh thinking. If people do not have proper and fair access to justice, we would, in effect, be denying justice to our community. To facilitate the task, it is important that a proper civil aid scheme is put in place. There is no point in talking about the courts and justice if they are abstract concepts to which people have no realistic prospect of gaining access. Those two points were about stability in the system and, along with the Executive, the powers that be at Westminster have provided additional financial stability and support, which is important.

Another package that was negotiated for policing and justice relates to two primary areas of importance. First, it is important that a new prison be developed in Northern Ireland to replace Magilligan prison, and proper finance must be put in place to address the issue. In addition, we need to look afresh at what should replace Magilligan prison. If we simply replace one building with a more modern one, I am not sure that we would be addressing the issue. We must be innovative. Do we have to have a huge, one-size-fits-all institution, or should we look at having separate facilities? Yesterday, I mentioned a women's prison. Furthermore, we must look at what sort of management we bring to that prison, and yesterday, the Minister of Finance and Personnel spoke about exploring something along the lines of a private finance initiative. I am not saying yes or no to that idea on behalf of the SDLP, but we must explore all possibilities. The cost of keeping prisoners

here is disproportionate compared to prison costs throughout the UK and, I think, in the Irish Republic. We must look at those costs and introduce efficiencies into the penal system. That will be a major task for the Justice Minister, who will, of course, have to work in co-operation with the Executive.

Secondly, there is an issue about capital expenditure on a new police college, about which a number of Members canvassed yesterday. The Finance Minister indicated that the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety must come up with reasonable proposals about the financing for the aspect of the college that it may be involved in.

2.15 pm

I can see that it is necessary for the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to do that, and I hope that it will come to an early decision. Time is running out. We must progress planning and so on for the training college. If we do not, we will lose a golden opportunity to establish a state-of-the-art college that would assist the Police Service and the Fire and Rescue Service. I am not sure whether the inclusion of the Prison Service is envisaged, but other services could be involved. Indeed, why do we not involve other police and fire and rescue services from the UK or the Republic in such a college? The more people involved, the more self-financing such a college would become.

We should look innovatively at any institution, such as a police college, to see whether we can do something more than just erect a building to replace the present college in Belfast. The new Department of Justice faces the challenge of thinking innovatively for local solutions to local problems. That would make a difference to our citizens' lives, and it is important that we put a great deal of effort into it. We have a golden opportunity to participate; let us avail ourselves of it. I support granting the Bill's Final Stage.

Dr Farry: The Alliance Party welcomes the Bill's Final Stage. It is a pity that Alban Maginness was so brief, at least in his own terms, because the Alliance Party is here in force: Naomi Long, Kieran McCarthy, Trevor Lunn and I had each planned to make half-hour speeches. However, given the tenor of the debate, I will forego that privilege.

In the spirit of where we are, I will make some brief comments as we close this important debate, which marks another major milestone on the road to the devolution of policing and justice to the Assembly. No doubt, the whole community will welcome the progress that we are making and, in particular, the workmanlike approach of the past couple of days. I am relatively new to the Chamber, but the Bill's speed of passage — perhaps warp-speed rather than accelerated passage — has set a precedent for legislation. It may be interesting to use that procedure again for important matters in future.

Members stressed that the budget is inherited and the new Department of Justice will eventually be in the same position as other Departments were in the first phase of the restoration of devolution in 2007. Essentially, the key is what happens from here fiscally. To summarise our position, which I do not doubt reflects the views expressed by other parties over the past few days, we need to see a short-term consolidation of the financial resources for justice. The generous financial package from the Prime Minister addresses only particular legacy pressures. It is extremely important that they be addressed, but they are only part of the package; there are ongoing cost pressures in the justice system that must be tackled.

We would welcome a one-year ring-fencing of the policing and justice budget to give space to a new Minister to come to terms with the issues in his or her Department. However, it is important to stress that that ring-fencing should be for only one year, and that matter has been well teased out by the Minister, who highlighted the need for every Department to undergo a process of internal challenge in how resources are allocated. We recognise the need for change in our system, and the profile of spending on justice in Northern Ireland is very different from that in other parts of the UK.

In some respects that is justified, given the ongoing terrorist threat and the legacy of division. There are wider things that we must do as a society to tackle those issues, not least implement a policy on cohesion, sharing and integration. Equally, however, some areas of expenditure are not justifiable in the current situation. It is important that we face up to that and tackle those issues.

We highlighted areas in which a different approach to policymaking could reduce the costs that are borne by the system. I was rather cheeky yesterday when I accused the Minister of sounding almost like a liberal. Of course, he is not — perish the thought. However, an evidence-based approach to policymaking and the markedly different approach based on what is cost effective often reach exactly the same conclusions about how things should be done differently. That type of joined-up working, which involves Departments, agencies, the Executive, local government and agencies in the criminal justice system, has the potential to provide more rounded solutions to policing and justice issues that will produce better outcomes, particularly in respect of safer communities.

In the near future, it is important that all other Departments examine their budgets to determine whether they can make any changes that would enable them better to integrate with the new Department of Justice. Alban Maginness rightly pointed out that the new Department is not simply an add on to the Executive or the NIO under a new name. Rather, the Department of Justice is about a new way of governance in Northern Ireland in which all Departments can work together to achieve shared outcomes. Other Departments can bring issues to the table to produce better solutions for local communities.

Over the past number of days, some of the immediate challenges have been raised. I welcome the Assembly's debate on the legal aid budget and the recognition that the short-term infusion of cash from the British Government serves only to address the ongoing pressures and to fix the historical baseline problem. The legal aid situation is unsustainable and requires reform in the near future. We will, no doubt, have more detailed discussions on the nature of that reform.

Alban Maginness also talked about a women's prison. I support that being considered as part of future capital investment, but a women's prison is only one part of a strategy to deal with female offenders. There is an argument to be made for more upfront investment in, for example, hostel provision in the community as a more effective way of dealing with some of the lower level offending by women. When on a tour of Hydebank Wood, I saw the current women's facility. Many of the women there have much wider mental health and self-harm issues. We

must consider a wider strategy to tackle female offending.

Some Members referred to the police college, but we should refer to it as the joint training college because the Prison Service and the Fire and Rescue Service will also be located there. It is critical for the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to engage in that process in the near future. I understand from the NIO that the business case has gone through the Treasury. A decision, therefore, must be made as quickly as possible.

I will make a final point, and I ask the Minister to reflect on it rather than giving a detailed answer today. The business cases that agencies make to the UK Treasury under the current criminal justice system need wider approval than will be the case with the Department of Finance and Personnel, as the two regimes operate different thresholds of approval. That may create different working practices in future governance. Each system has its pros and cons. I ask the Minister to comment on how he envisages those two working practices being integrated into one system. We should avoid a situation in which decisions that are at a certain stage with the UK Treasury are forced back to square one with the Department of Finance and Personnel. A smooth handover is required from one to the other.

I welcome the legislation and look forward to future debates.

Mr Weir: I do not know whether my colleague from North Down was using some of the visits to try to audition for some latter-day part in 'Prisoner Cell Block H'. He may have seen himself as a prison warder, but he can answer that point.

We have had a focused debate, and, broadly speaking, there is acceptance across the Chamber that we have a reasonable Budget to take us forward. That is thanks to the efforts that were made in the negotiations with the Prime Minister to secure the additional money.

I indicated yesterday that the NIO sets the overall Budget and carves up the cake. Whenever people take on any new function, it is inevitable that direct rule will be their starting point. Undoubtedly, a lot of good work has been done to ensure that we have something adequate for the future.

I take slight exception to what Mr Farry said, but, to be fair, I was not in the House for any other speeches, so I am not in a great position to take exception to anybody else's contribution. We have seen that there are funding gaps in some of the provisions on hearing loss, for example, and that the Assembly and Executive Review Committee identified other gaps. Nevertheless, the Member rightly identified that the financial package takes care of a range of legacy issues. It is very important that we are not constantly dragged back to the past in financial terms when looking at policing and justice, or that costs exist that lie outside the responsibility of this House and beyond any opportunity that it has to fix the problems.

Even transferring police pensions, for example, from the departmental expenditure limit suggests that an element of a legacy of the past remains. The particular problems that we had in Northern Ireland meant that the size of the police force was much greater than that of comparable forces elsewhere in the United Kingdom. Indeed, a range of circumstances means that we still have a larger police force. However, even reducing the current complement by 13,500 will mean that, financially, the legacy issue will remain great. Compared with pension levels in any other police force, pensions here will be a particularly top-heavy weight on the overall bill. Given the fact that we will be victims of actuarial changes, that will impact very much in the future.

Nevertheless, I think that the process has not simply been a question of addressing legacy issues. That is where I disagree with Mr Farry somewhat. The baseline figures on legal aid, for example, have been moved up, and that is useful in providing a firmer financial foundation.

This Budget is largely not of our own making. A number of Members who spoke yesterday and today were right in identifying a range of issues and problems for which more imaginative thinking on policing and justice could provide better solutions. In many ways, that is the value of having policing and justice in our hands, because there will be opportunities for a bit of blue-sky thinking and for changing the policies on how we do things. As Mr Farry and others outlined, that will lead to financial consequences. The point is to provide solutions to the problems that we face in Northern Ireland. Those will be the challenges for the Department

of Justice, and, collectively, Members look forward to solving them.

I believe that the Budget and the financial package will give the new Minister of Justice a degree of flexibility and room for manoeuvre. It would have been completely wrong to plunge the new Minister of Justice immediately into some form of financial crisis or fire-fighting role. It can give the Department and the Assembly some space and time in which to try to see how the policy issues on policing and justice for all our people can be better delivered. That should unite us around the Chamber.

In many ways, those are questions for another day, but the Budget will put us on a firm foundation for the future and will give us the scope to be able to meet the needs of today. I hope that we can have the imagination for tomorrow to look at a better way to deliver some of those issues. I commend the Budget (No. 2) Bill to the House.

2.30 pm

Mr B McCrea: I have just come from a fairly lengthy meeting of the Policing Board, which my colleague Mr Weir also attended. It raised some issues in respect of dealing with the past that will have a significant impact on the amount of time and effort that the justice system will have to put towards that matter.

The Ulster Unionist Party is concerned about the suggestion that in the past people have been given an amnesty for what they have done, as a way of moving forward. As Members will know, the Assembly recently hosted 34 countries from around the world at an event that considered conflict. One conclusion to come from that was that people were prepared to delay justice for a certain time to give them a chance to stabilise matters, for instance, but it could not be denied forever.

I hear from my colleagues that the immediacy of the budget has been taken care of, every eventuality has been looked at, and the First Minister and deputy First Minister have been involved in ensuring that we get a good budget. The difficulty is that a large number of issues remain untested. Perhaps that ties in with the cohesion, sharing and integration strategy, for instance, but it is an exercise that will concentrate the mind of the Assembly for years to come. We will have to think of a completely

different way of dealing with justice issues and making sure that they are properly financed.

The deals that were done in the past mean that tensions will, inevitably, rise, if one side of society is able to progress justice-related issues — of course, there may be a number of cases ongoing — but there is not balance. Therefore, those issues should not be forgotten in the rush to act to get the operational matters under control.

The Minister was a member of the Policing Board, so perhaps he will give me his views on another of my concerns. The biggest problem that the Policing Board has in managing an organisation the size of the PSNI, with over 7,500 officers, is the question of whether it can be managed on an annual basis. The Chief Constable continually tells us that he needs the flexibility of a three-year period, at least, to manage an organisation of that size. Previously in this debate, Members said that it might be right to ring-fence the PSNI budget for one year. However, that would mean that it would have to be looked at again, and that concerns me.

I am also interested to know the Minister's position from a financial point of view on what would happen if, as has been suggested by others, the number of police officers was to be reduced. Perhaps the Chief Constable thinks that he might be able to do that. Would the budget be reduced correspondingly? Or will the Chief Constable be given the freedom, through the Justice Committee, to manage the situation as he sees fit? That raises a number of other issues about getting Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) involved and obtaining better community involvement, and many Members were concerned about those issues. Surely, all those issues should involve interplay between the Department for Social Development and other factors concerning the cohesion, sharing and integration strategy. The financing of those issues is of particular importance.

I want to conclude, because, as I indicated during the debate on the Bill's Second Stage, there is no need to repeat a lot of what has already been said. I said that my contribution would be mercifully short. I am sure that the Minister was pleased to hear that, and I am sure that he would acknowledge that I was mercifully short yesterday. There are many things to be resolved. It is a matter of interplay between different agencies and Departments. There is concern that we are not sure exactly

how much power and responsibility the Minister of Justice will have. If he will have the power to "carve up" the budget, as Mr Weir put it, where will he place his priorities? I share other Members' deep disquiet about the performance of the PPS and, indeed, the cost of legal aid. Those issues must be looked at. Although the Court Service is quite efficient, it must also be examined. All of those matters interact. I wonder how that will be managed, given that finance is key to all of it.

I must confess that, having looked at the Budget (No. 2) Bill, I am not even sure whether the pensions element, which is now being transferred from the departmental expenditure limit to annually managed expenditure, is actually in the Budget. I believe that it amounts to some £400 million. Perhaps, the Minister will deal with that in his winding-up speech. I am sure that he will take every opportunity to explain it to me. The problem is whether the Assembly truly knows where it is spending those vast sums of money.

In conclusion, my party made its stand and said that it was unhappy with a number of policing and justice issues. Nevertheless, we are where we are. It is important that the transition will be as smooth as possible. On that basis, my party will, of course, support the Bill. We hope that other parties and Members will engage positively with us to do what is best for all of Northern Ireland's people.

Mr Ford: It is a pleasure to follow that constructive contribution from Mr Basil McCrea. One does not always have that pleasure in the Chamber. He highlighted a number of issues that must be addressed through partnership and where there has been a certain lack of it so far. Let us hope that that is a sign that Members who found themselves in a tiny minority when the Assembly voted on the principle of devolution will join the rest of us to try to establish how devolution will be handled in this place.

Other Members have reiterated what I said in yesterday's debate — I know that the Minister would want me to be a keen environmentalist and to recycle as much as possible of the speech that I made yesterday — which is that we are dealing with an inherited budget. The Assembly has not been enabled to set its own priorities. During the first year, that budget will not be able to make any significant difference.

Clearly, the Assembly will be able to start to address different ways of doing things on certain issues; not simply issues that Mr McCrea has discussed, which require the Minister to shuffle the budget internally, but issues that require the Assembly to look at the entire workings of the Executive in order to promote the kind of joined-up government and collective responsibility that some of us have been banging on about for a long time but have yet to see.

I will make a further cheap jibe at the Minister. As my colleague Stephen Farry accused him of, he is starting to sound far too much like a liberal for his own political good, especially as we face a general election. He is, however, absolutely correct when he talks about the need to promote rehabilitation and different ways to manage offenders. The blunt reality is that society does not provide safety for people by banging up offenders in prison, but by preventing them from reoffending. That is the key issue.

We must face the fact that although Northern Ireland's Probation Board is among the most efficient probation services, if it is not the single most efficient service, throughout the United Kingdom, its Prison Service is at the bottom of the league when compared with those of England, Wales and Scotland. In order to address those issues, the Assembly must ensure that it achieves a justice system that works differently and uses available resources in a way that fosters efficiency and partnership and promotes community safety by preventing reoffending, rather than simply having headline-grabbing knee-jerk reactions. My former professional colleague, Mr Bell, who has just joined the debate and is sitting behind the Minister, will, undoubtedly, agree with me on those practicalities.

The efficient use of the budget must be addressed in a number of Departments, not least the Department of Justice. That may be relevant to relatively minor issues such as the reform of the courts and the Tribunals Service to provide for greater administrative efficiency and more effective use of buildings.

The fundamental issue that I just highlighted — management of offenders — is significant. That could be done through probation, through more appropriate use of community sentencing or through better supervision in the community.

It would involve additional resources for the Probation Board, but it would enable a reduction in resources to the Prison Service, which would not only cost less but ensure a better outcome. That issue must be addressed. Although the budget covers the issue at the moment, it will, nonetheless, need to be examined through in-year monitoring and on a wider basis in years to come.

A question was raised about policing manpower. There is no doubt that the Chief Constable is doing an extremely effective job in managing his resources to allow more officers on the street and fewer officers behind desks. However, that involves a reallocation of resources and movement to ensure a more effective use of available resources. That may not result in a headline about Police Service manpower numbers, but it will certainly result in that manpower — and woman power — being better handled to meet the needs of the public and ensuring that administration is carried out more efficiently. Investment in IT systems or buildings, for example, may be necessary to meet the needs of our people better. All those issues are part of the package that will be covered by this budget. Although it is an inherited budget, the Assembly, the Executive and the new Department will need to look carefully and closely at the detail of how the budget is spent.

Other Members mentioned the massive crisis that we face with the legal aid budget. The Prime Minister's package includes additional resources for that budget, but only for an extremely short period. Difficult decisions will have to be taken soon because the commitment to a legal aid budget has a lead-in time, which will not necessarily be addressed easily if we say that the situation is OK because the Prime Minister's package covers the next couple of years.

I will return to my point about promoting greater collective responsibility. There are problems with the community planning process. We all know of the difficulties with the review of public administration (RPA) process, and, speaking as a member of the Environment Committee, I detect little sign that the Department of the Environment and the various agencies that are working on the RPA are in a position to get matters right to deal with the wider remit of community planning.

Last week's consultation paper from the Northern Ireland Office — I hope that it is one of the last consultation papers that it will

ever issue on justice issues — considered the restructuring of community safety partnerships and district policing partnerships to provide a more coherent and joined-up process at local level. That is absolutely necessary if we are to move forward. It should reduce costs, and it will certainly provide greater co-ordination among a range of statutory bodies, including the Police Service, the councils and the voluntary sector, in meeting the needs of local communities. However, the paper raises questions about commitment from other public agencies and Departments in promoting that form of co-operation. Sometimes, the community planning process is left solely to the councils and to one or two other agencies that are prepared to engage. However, there is a significant role for the Department of Education, its boards and its agencies, in particular, the Youth Service.

There are issues with mental health services and the wider engagement of social work and primary healthcare agencies in relation to their role in helping to reduce crime and the fear of crime. Sometimes, those other agencies, because of their focus and the difficulties under which they operate, are not good at engaging in the partnerships that will be necessary in the future.

There is talk about how this budget will be administered and about the role of the Department of Justice, but there are issues for a number of Departments. OFMDFM and the Public Prosecution Service are mentioned in the Bill, but there are issues about the commitment of other Ministers, other Departments and their agencies in promoting what are called “crime and disorder reduction partnerships” in England and Wales and in looking, in a meaningful way, at the contribution that all agencies can make when they work together. It cannot be a matter of other agencies washing their hands and leaving it to the Police Service, the Probation Board and the Prison Service when something goes wrong.

2.45 pm

Mr Bell: Does the Member agree that, to date, the Youth Justice Agency, with its youth conferencing programme and multi-agency approach, has served as a positive model? Will he join me in paying tribute to social work staff, who united to ensure that sentencing reflects the crime and includes some element of

restorative practice, which is more meaningful, particularly for young offenders?

Does the Member also agree that we should be cautious about lambasting the Prison Service, given that that service’s men and women, many of whom gave their lives over a considerable period, faced one of the worst examples of terrorism that western Europe has ever seen yet managed to run a professional system throughout that time?

Mr Ford: I thank the Member for his contribution. He raises two interesting points. I agree entirely with what he says about the Youth Justice Agency. Its youth conferencing model has set the tone for other agencies and other regions on these islands in providing a proactive and collective response to the difficulties that were experienced. I do not know whether he intended to parody Gilbert and Sullivan with the term that he used, but we do need to make the punishment fit the crime, and we need to do much more work in that area.

His second point is also important. I was not “lambasting” the officers who run the Prison Service, many of whom were there for many years in the heat of a very different set of circumstances. However, we must acknowledge that real problems exist at this stage with how effectively offenders are managed in order to prevent their reoffending. Those problems exist because a different job now needs to be done. The job that the Prison Service did under a terrorist threat is no longer the same job. The Prison Service’s job now becomes one of the rehabilitation of non-politically motivated offenders. Good pieces of work are being done across the Northern Ireland Prison Service, but there is much to be done in other areas to catch up with other regions on these islands. I join Mr Bell in paying tribute to those who bore the heat during the Prison Service’s difficult years, but there are real reasons why we need to ask it to go a stage further and work differently.

Finally, Basil McCrea said that he was unsure of what the Minister’s powers will be. We are in a difficult situation, and I suspect that he is not the only Member who is unsure of the fine details of how devolution will work. Some of us may be slightly better acquainted with the detail because we chose to engage at an earlier stage than Mr McCrea and his colleagues did. Nonetheless, there are real issues to sort out. Part of what needs to be done now is to ensure

that put in place are the various protocols and mechanisms; arrangements between the Department of Justice and the rest of the Executive; arrangements for the Minister to work with other Ministers to promote the partnership working about which I have talked; and methods of ensuring full engagement, both regionally and locally. We need to see partnerships built.

Mr B McCrea: Will the Member give way?

Mr Ford: All will be vital if we are to build a new mechanism for the future. Even though I have finished, I will give way.

Mr B McCrea: That is very kind of you, Mr Ford. Since you have the benefit of having engaged much earlier than I did, are you happy that all outstanding issues concerning the powers and suchlike of the Minister of Justice have been resolved to your personal satisfaction? *[Laughter.]*

Mr Ford: Mr Speaker, it may be funny, but on a previous occasion you reprimanded Members from the Ulster Unionist Party for addressing other Members inappropriately.

Mr McCrea asked whether things have been resolved to my personal satisfaction. He needs to learn the realities of life. We need to get the policies, procedures and practices right so that the entire justice system delivers for all the people of Northern Ireland. Whatever speculation the Member may wish to indulge, that is far more important than the interests of any individual, whomever he or she might be.

Mr Attwood: I apologise to the House and the Minister because, along with my colleagues on the Policing Board Mr McCrea and Mr Weir we had a long meeting in the Stormont Hotel this morning. I am grateful that we had that meeting, because, in my view, it brought into sharp relief, which may have been reflected in Mr McCrea's comments, some of the narrative that the SDLP was trying to outline yesterday, which the Minister, unfairly, referred to as a wish list. What the SDLP was trying to do through eight contributions yesterday was to create a narrative around the character and nature of the devolution of justice, such as that it impacts in a positive way on the quality of the lives of the citizens and the community that all Members represent. The point of the exercise yesterday was to create a narrative, a checklist and standards against which we should judge the devolution of justice in the future.

Less than a day later in the Stormont Hotel, there was a meeting of the Policing Board and the PSNI leadership. However, much more critically, there were people at the meeting who have had harsh and bitter experiences of policing and justice, the state and paramilitarism over the years when we did not have devolution of justice and policing and in the years since we have had devolution of policing through the Policing Board and the district policing partnerships. In their own way, those people talked about their experiences and gave an insight into the standards that are going to be required if devolution of justice is going to live up to their hopes and the hopes of the community in a way that devolution has not done in the past three years.

The Minister might want to portray that as a wish list, and others may want to portray it in whatever way they choose, but what the SDLP was trying to do yesterday, and what it is trying to do today, is to be authentic to the experience of people and the relevance of devolution and justice, and outline why the budget of £1.4 billion must be better spent and properly spent, so that the needs of the people we met this morning can be met. That is why I was glad, and I am sure that my colleagues were glad, that we were at that meeting. I am sure that other members of the Policing Board — Mr Spratt in particular — could not be there because of other duties in the Assembly, and I acknowledge that, but that was the value of this morning's exercise, and that is the relevance of this morning's exercise to the Budget debate.

I hope that, after I comment on what the Minister said yesterday about wish lists, he may want to correct his portrayal of what the SDLP members were talking about, because it was much more well intentioned, much more significant, and much more critical than the way in which the Minister portrayed it.

There were a number of lessons to be learned from what went on in the Stormont Hotel this morning. As Mr McCrea and Mr Weir might have indicated in their speeches — unfortunately I did not hear them — people spoke about their expectations, which may be heightened because of devolution of policing and justice, of what the state, through its politicians, the PPS and the PSNI, might be able to deliver, through the £840 million that will go to the policing side, in relation to their harsh experiences. That is relevant to the Budget debate. Their harsh

experiences happen to have arisen from the activities of the UVF in Mount Vernon and all that horror and tragedy.

In fact, what the Policing Board was trying to do this morning in relation to the money that it will get was to establish the right template for dealing with all similar horrors, including the activities of other terror gangs and other organisations that were heavily infiltrated by state agencies, including MI5 and the police. That extends far beyond the activities of the agent involved in Operation Ballast. It involves other agents in other organisations, including the IRA, who are under investigation by the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland.

The Policing Board was trying to establish how best to use the money that it will get following the passing of the Bill to create the right mechanisms to satisfy not just the families of those who were victims of the agent and his gang involved in Operation Ballast but the victims of other agents and gangs, such as the agent known as Scappaticci or Stakeknife, who is under investigation by the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland. That is what we are trying to do to ensure that the money is spent most effectively for the people of Northern Ireland.

My more global point is that the budget line that the Policing Board and the PSNI will get further to the Budget (No. 2) Bill after 12 April is subject to two potential threats and risks. One of those is financial, and one is of a broader nature. On the financial point, I welcome the fact that, yesterday, the Minister agreed that, given the fact that we are inheriting spending plans, it would not be wise to go against the Assembly and Executive Review Committee's advice that the budget should be ring-fenced for 2010-11. After 2010-11, it could be game on.

The justice budget is £1.4 billion, and nearly £150 million goes to the policing side of the devolved policing and justice budget. Therefore, it is not beyond credulity to speculate that, given the expected consequences of the next Budget in London, there will be a growing temptation for a future Minister of Justice to begin to nibble away at the devolved policing budget. I am sure that that will not happen on the watch of this Minister of Justice, given his experience on the Policing Board during the difficult early days of its first mandate, when the UUP, the SDLP and the DUP measured up in a way that others failed to do so.

In the future, however, that temptation may well be difficult to resist. If a Minister were to do that, he or she would compromise the expectations and hopes of the people who the Policing Board met this morning and of all of the other families and organisations that represent victims and survivors who have suffered at the hands of state agencies and paramilitary organisations.

There are arguments about ring-fencing for 2010-11, and no one, least of all the SDLP, would argue that ring-fencing can be done in perpetuity. However, given the sensitivity and the profile of the issues that we discussed this morning, the important principle is that some thought must be put into ensuring that, in future Budget Bills, budget lines for the police are not compromised in a way that affects the issues that I have been speaking about.

I am minded that Question Time is approaching and that it might take some time to elaborate on the much broader issue that I wish to raise. Subject to your discretion, Mr Speaker, I shall conclude my remarks at this stage.

Mr Speaker: I ask the House to take its ease before we take questions to the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment. Mr Attwood will be called to speak again after Question Time.

The debate stood suspended.

3.00 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Invest NI: Lagan Valley

1. **Mr Lunn** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how much Invest NI has spent in the Lagan Valley constituency in 2009-2010. (AQO 989/10)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mrs Foster): Invest NI does not monitor expenditure on a parliamentary constituency basis. However, provisional figures for offers approved between 1 April 2009 and 28 February 2010 indicate that assistance worth £5.9 million was provided, which contributed towards planned investment of £20 million in the Lagan Valley constituency. In comparison, £2.6 million was offered between 1 April 2008 and 28 February 2009, which contributed towards planned investment of £8 million. That total assistance included almost £600,000 of support towards 11 projects under the short-term aid scheme and the accelerated support fund. Those schemes were introduced in direct response to the economic downturn to help companies take the necessary steps to consolidate and improve their competitiveness.

Mr Lunn: I thank the Minister for her answer. Given the criticism of Invest NI in the Barnett report and the suggestion that it should perhaps widen its horizons with regard to investment opportunities, does the Minister advocate that Invest Northern Ireland should offer support to local council-led initiatives, particularly those involving INI client companies?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: I am not sure where the Member is coming from. The criticism, if one can call it that, of Invest NI was that it should spend more of its time and money on research and development. I think that the Member is alluding to small businesses, and, of course, Invest NI wants to encourage them to work in conjunction with councils. I am sure that he will appreciate the success of Invest NI's credit crunch seminars, which were run in conjunction with

councils, the Chamber of Commerce and some private interests and were well received by the small business community.

Invest Northern Ireland will also be setting up a small business unit. Some people believe that Invest NI's mission centres on foreign direct investment; nothing could be further from the truth. The majority of Invest NI's money is, in fact, spent on indigenous companies in Northern Ireland. We need to strike a balance between foreign direct investment and indigenous companies and ensure that small companies are given the opportunities to develop their growth potential.

Ms J McCann: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. The Minister will be aware of the Economic Reform Group's recent report on the introduction of new tax incentives, such as the reduction in corporation tax, to encourage inward investment. Does the Minister have any plans to meet that group to discuss those proposals?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: I have no difficulty in meeting that group and discussing its proposals. However, I have some difficulties with the report, not least because it does not point out how much it will cost the Northern Ireland Executive to lower corporation tax, nor does it address the fundamental issue of tax-raising powers for this place. However, I am more than happy to speak to the group and discuss the issues raised.

Mr O'Loan: Will the Minister explain why budgets that were originally designed to provide grant aid for foreign investments have been redesignated to provide company assistance and develop local enterprise?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The budgets were redesignated after we took on board what was happening in the economy. I would have thought that Mr O'Loan, of all people, would have applauded us for doing that, because he has asked us on many occasions in the House to examine our priorities. That is what we have done in that instance. Most people recognised that some indigenous companies needed assistance, and we, therefore, decided to help them in their hour of need.

Foreign direct investment and indigenous companies are not two separate pillars for Invest NI. In fact, a lot of crossover opportunities

exist. Consider the Kelman company in Lagan Valley, which Mr Lunn will know well. Kelman has been acquired by GE Energy, which is a major energy company based in America. I had the opportunity to speak to one of its representatives when I was in America last week. That acquisition should be viewed as a real vote of confidence in indigenous industries here. GE Energy told me that it decided to acquire Kelman and come to Northern Ireland because of the skills and engineering technology that are available here. Therefore, there is an overlap between our indigenous industries and foreign direct investment, and we should be very pleased about that.

Employment: Green Energy

2. Mr Leonard asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what measures she is taking, in collaboration with universities, regional colleges, Invest NI and local firms and in conjunction with Ministers in Dublin, to secure 'green energy' and related jobs. (AQO 990/10)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and

Investment: I have a range of initiatives that are aimed at promoting sustainable energy and at maximising the potential for green jobs, including the strategic energy framework, which is currently being revised. Invest Northern Ireland has been actively promoting opportunities for local companies. Last week, along with the Crown Estate, it hosted a very successful meet-the-buyer event for companies involved in offshore wind energy. It also recently hosted an energy and environment conference. DETI, Invest Northern Ireland and Matrix are currently facilitating the development of early stage industry-led innovation communities, including a number that are working in clean energy and renewables. Those communities include the Global Marine Alliance and the Global Wind Alliance, through which local and international firms are involved in exploiting wind energy technologies in collaboration with the south-west regional college. On 22 March 2010, junior Minister Kelly and I attended an energy meeting of the British-Irish Council that focused on economic opportunities and the creation of green jobs. I will make a full statement on that meeting to the Assembly following the Easter recess.

Mr Leonard: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her answer. She has given a couple of positive indications

about the global nature of the issue. Does she think that there is still more to be done whereby, similar to the Obama drive for green energy jobs, universities and colleges could link up and garner a lot of energy and international co-operation to maximise jobs locally?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and

Investment: We have seen that happen to some extent in Northern Ireland in collaboration with colleagues in the Republic of Ireland and Scotland. Through the ISLES project, which we discussed yesterday at the British-Irish Council meeting, universities and regional colleges, which the Member mentioned, are becoming involved in looking at research and development and in turning that into industry opportunities that can be facilitated by government policy. That falls into what we are talking about in relation to Matrix. It is a very exciting time for Northern Ireland in relation to green energy jobs, and there are great opportunities for local firms. Those opportunities are not just purely in renewables but are also in the help that renewables can provide for companies, such as Harland and Wolff, which may need to diversify into this sort of area. I know that Harland and Wolff sees this very much as an opportunity.

Mr I McCrea: Will the Minister detail the measures that Invest NI has taken to ensure the deployment of renewable energy technologies in Northern Ireland? Will she also comment on the approach that the party opposite has taken in respect of the North/South interconnector?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and

Investment: The answer to the Member's first question is that Invest Northern Ireland, in conjunction with my Department, is very keen to exploit the existing opportunities in the green economy. We believe that there could be upwards of 4,000 jobs available to us if we could take advantage of those opportunities. As I said in my substantive answer, we hosted an energy and environment conference last year to look at opportunities, and that was very well received by the industry. We are collaborating with the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland on two studies that are looking at the infrastructure required to take full advantage of the opportunities in marine energy deployment. There is no point in having the energy if we are unable to get it on to the grid and make it available.

At the British-Irish Council meeting, we discussed regional connectivity issues and the grid. Part of that discussion was on the important need for the North/South interconnector, especially to ensure security of supply and in relation to competition in the all-Ireland single electricity market. I know that my colleague Eamon Ryan in the Republic of Ireland is keen to see that go ahead too. Difficult decisions will have to be made on whether the interconnector is overhead or underground. It is similar to the Wombles, but it is more a case of underground, overground, wandering free. However, this is a serious issue, and people have serious concerns that need to be addressed. Part of yesterday's BIC discussion concerned the public acceptability of renewables and the need for discussion about why we need to move into renewable energy and away from our single fossil fuel resource.

Mr Speaker: I remind Members that they should continue to rise in their place if they wish to ask supplementary questions.

Mr McHugh: Thank you, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her answer on the work that has been done collaboratively with the South in the drive towards green energy and its potential to create jobs.

Mr Speaker: The Member should come to his question.

Mr McHugh: Has the Minister done any work in an all-island capacity to assess the savings that could be made in research and consultancy payments, which may be duplicated in the North and the South? Are there savings to be made for all?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: As I said, part of research and development is the joining up of Administrations. We were able to work collaboratively with Scotland and the Republic of Ireland through the Irish-Scottish Links on Energy Study (ISLES), and, as a result of that tripartite arrangement, we can now access European Union funding.

Green energy is a European-wide issue. When we considered grids at the BIC meeting yesterday, we not only considered the grids around these islands but those in the Baltic Sea and around France and Belgium. We must consider connectivity in a pan-European sense. It is important that we do not simply think of

ourselves alone, if I can put it like that, but that we think of ourselves in the context of Europe-wide policies, which are very important.

Rose Energy

3. **Mr W Clarke** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline her Department's involvement to date in Rose Energy's proposal for an incinerator plant at Glenavy; and how much public money her Department is considering allocating to this project. (AQO 991/10)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Rose Energy was one of a number of projects first considered by my Department in 2006 under the environment and renewable energy fund, which was a competitive and time-bound fund with limited resources. The project was subsequently developed further by its promoters, who then began the process of seeking financial assistance from Invest Northern Ireland, which is currently evaluating the business case. As it is a commercial proposition that is still under evaluation, it would be inappropriate for me to comment on the amount and structure of the funding being sought.

Mr W Clarke: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her response. Does she agree with the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, Michelle Gildernew, and the Committee for the Environment that the project proposed by Rose Energy should be subject to a public inquiry before decisions are made on whether public moneys should be committed to it?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: If I were the Minister of the Environment, I would be able to answer that question, but I am not the Minister of the Environment; I am the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment.

I will look closely at the proposal that is before Invest Northern Ireland when it comes to me. I will not comment on that issue. I must make the decision on funding, so it would be premature of me to comment at this stage.

Mr Bell: The poultry subsector has a turnover of hundreds of millions of pounds and increasing sales of tens of millions of pounds. Will the Minister outline the size of the Northern Ireland

poultry industry and give the House some idea of the number of people directly employed by it?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and

Investment: The poultry sector is a subsector of the wider food and drink processing sector. It accounted for 19.4% of Northern Ireland's total manufacturing sales in 2008, making it the largest contributor. The gross turnover for the whole sector in that period was estimated at £2.975 billion. The food and drink sector is huge, and it is sometimes overlooked by some of our economist friends when it should not be.

It is estimated that the poultry sector currently employs 4,348 people in a full-time equivalent capacity, which is a slight increase on the 2007 employment figure. It is the largest employer in the Northern Ireland food and drink processing sector and is, therefore, very significant. It is a sector that I greatly value and one which, I hope, will continue to grow in Northern Ireland.

Mr Ford: Will the Minister confirm whether there is a timescale for Invest NI to consider the potential grant aid for the Rose Energy project, what the total budget is for that particular type of renewable energy and whether other proposals are under consideration?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and

Investment: The proposal is going through the due diligence process at the moment. One never likes to pre-empt that, but I expect a decision to be with me relatively soon. I do not have the figures on the total budget, but I am happy to give them to the Member in writing.

The issue needs to be dealt with. Mr Willie Clarke mentioned the DARD Minister. Some 200,000 tons of poultry litter have to be dealt with, and we need to find a solution quickly.

3.15 pm

Mrs D Kelly: The Minister said that the proposal is going through the due diligence process at the moment. Which Departments will be required to provide support in order for the funding to be secured? What advice has the Minister received from other Departments on the issue?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and

Investment: We need to know whether planning permission will be forthcoming and whether a public inquiry will be commissioned. I have received no indication about what will happen on those issues, but I understand that DOE

officials are very close to making determinations on them.

Energy from Waste

4. **Mr B McCrea** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what plans her Department has to encourage the development of an energy from waste plant. (AQO 992/10)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and

Investment: Energy from waste has the potential to contribute substantially to the non-wind element of my Department's target for 12% of electricity consumption to be from indigenous renewable sources by 2012. Additionally, energy from waste diversifies the energy mix, reduces the reliance on fossil fuels and has the potential for job creation. My Department, through Invest Northern Ireland, is working on the development of four different energy from waste projects, which are at varying stages of progress.

Mr B McCrea: Is the Minister aware of the existence of such a plant in downtown Sheffield, which produces electricity and district heating for a large section of the city and has very clean exhaust emissions? Will she indicate whether the four projects that she is looking at will be built in urban or rural centres?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and

Investment: We want to look at the prospects for heat from renewable sources, which is one of the reasons why the Department is looking at this area. The Department has been talking to Kedco, a company with which the Member may be familiar, about what it can do in relation to the matter.

It is a good idea to have renewable heat processes available to local installations, local schools, local homes and other industries so that use can be made of renewable heat and renewable electricity. If we are conducting those projects in rural areas — a lot of the anaerobic digestion will be carried out in rural locations — it is important that we have access to the grid so that that electricity can be put on to the grid and that renewable heat can be made accessible to all.

Mr Butler: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Those plants are, in effect, incinerators. The term "energy from waste plants" has been contrived to soften public opposition. Does the Minister agree that there needs to be widespread public consultation

about proposed plants and, if necessary, a public inquiry? Given the fiasco in Belfast where, on the one hand, there were councillors voting against such a plant and, on the other, people saying that there should be a public consultation —

Mr Speaker: Will the Member ask his question?

Mr Butler: Does the Minister agree that there should be widespread consultation on plans for such plants and, if necessary, a public inquiry?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and

Investment: I agree that public acceptability of all renewable energy generation is an issue that we need to address, and I hope that Members will give leadership on that. If we are to meet our renewable energy targets, we will have to look at all the types of renewable energy generation that are available to us. Those include — the Member may not like the phrase — energy from waste, anaerobic digestion, the new marine technologies and the wind technologies that we have already. We need to look at the whole range of options, and part of that will involve discussion with the public. I very much hope that Members will become involved in that discussion.

Mr G Robinson: What is the current position of each of the four energy from waste projects that are under consideration?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and

Investment: There are four energy from waste projects under consideration, and I have already touched on the Rose Energy project. Invest NI is engaged in ongoing negotiations with the directors of Linergy power in Dungannon with a view to securing a mutually acceptable offer of support. I hope that that letter of offer will be issued shortly. Granville Eco-Park is conducting another of the projects, also in Dungannon. Invest NI continues to work with that company to resolve any outstanding issues and move that project forward. Finally, Strabane Mills recently secured planning approval and is about to begin construction of a plant at a total cost of £10 million. That plant is expected to be in operation by early 2011.

Hughes Christensen

5. **Mr McFarland** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline

progress in relation to her negotiations with Hughes Christensen and its employees in Castlereagh. (AQO 993/10)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and

Investment: I met senior executives in Houston last Friday to discuss the proposals in more detail, and I assure the Assembly that we continue to explore all available options to secure the best outcome for Northern Ireland. Officials will continue to liaise with the parent company and the local management team at this very difficult time for employees and their families. We are considering a feasibility study on phased withdrawal that will, hopefully, secure employment until the end of this year. In addition, other discussions are taking place on the retention of a Baker Hughes presence in Northern Ireland beyond that phase.

Mr McFarland: I thank the Minister for her comprehensive answer. Does she have a tighter idea of the timescale within which results are likely?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and

Investment: As I said, a feasibility study is under way with a view to phasing the job reduction over a period of time up to Christmas. That is one element. Negotiations are ongoing between the employees and the company on enhanced redundancy packages, which is a matter for the company, the union and the employees. Beyond that, we are looking at ways to provide assistance to the company and to create the opportunity for a longer-term Baker Hughes presence in Northern Ireland. We are reluctant to lose the presence of Baker Hughes in east Belfast. It was one of the first foreign direct investment companies to come here, over 50 years ago, and we must work with the company to understand its needs and to find ways to enable it to stay in Northern Ireland.

Mrs Long: I thank the Minister for the work that she has done on that issue. I am interested to know whether, in light of the reduction in its order book, the company has, for example, considered working a shorter week rather than withdrawing. It seems that the company's local work is more than comparable with the work that it could get at other sites. I am concerned that the company will simply write off the local plant.

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and

Investment: The company was at pains to stress to me, the First Minister and the chief

executive of Invest Northern Ireland, who met the Baker Hughes officials with me, that its decision on the Belfast plant — I know that it is cold comfort for the workers — was in no way a commentary on the skills and abilities that the company has given to Baker Hughes for many years. However, Baker Hughes made it clear that its actions have been taken in the context of a substantial restructuring of its entire global network as a direct result of global market conditions and a significant downturn in demand. Baker Hughes is a huge company, and, at the minute, we are exploring opportunities to allow us to retain its presence in Northern Ireland. Invest Northern Ireland officials continue to engage with the parent company in Texas. It is essential that we do everything possible to keep the company in east Belfast.

Mr Ross: What is the Minister's assessment of the state of the FDI market at present?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:

Following the global financial crisis of September 2008, Invest NI has experienced uncertainty in the market. Companies are focusing on cost containment, and some have indicated that they will defer investment decisions and review business strategies. We have seen the fundamental business look that Baker Hughes has carried out; it shared some of that with us. As a result, the pipeline of new FDI prospects is not as strong as it was 12 months ago. That is not to say that there are no FDI opportunities. Indeed, we were able to look at some of those opportunities during our visit to the United States last week, and Invest NI will continue to pursue all the available options actively.

During our time in the States, we made an announcement that a company will place its European, Middle Eastern and African headquarters in Belfast. I have been told that that substantial achievement was obtained because the Invest NI client executive kept coming back time and time again and did not give up on getting the message across about what Northern Ireland has to offer in terms of skills, our location in the European market and the fact that we are a stepping stone between America, Europe and the Middle East. She got a result. I commend the work of Invest Northern Ireland operatives in the field; they do a tremendous job, whether in India, America or across the world.

Mr P Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. What effort is Invest NI making to keep the company in greater Belfast?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:

I assume that the Member is referring to Baker Hughes. The client executive has been in constant contact with the company, as she was even before the decision was made in Texas. She continues to work with local management to see what can be done through our local schemes. Before the announcement was made, she was talking to the company about new projects and programmes. When the announcement was made, we used our best efforts to contact the company in Texas. I want to thank Declan Kelly, the special economic envoy from America, who assisted us in setting up the meeting in Texas. He will continue to support us, whether on FDI or the indigenous companies that embarked on a trade mission last week. We will continue to engage with Baker Hughes. We are actively engaged with it at present, and our team in America will be with it very soon.

Tidal Power

6. **Mr Hamilton** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what plans her Department has to harness the potential of tidal power. (AQO 994/10)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:

DETI's draft offshore renewable energy strategic action plan sets out the key actions that my Department will take to ensure that Northern Ireland makes the most of its marine resources. The consultation on the plan was completed recently. It aims to further secure our overall energy supply and create new economic opportunities for businesses here. The next milestone will be a competitive call, which will be run by the Crown Estate in 2010-11, for leases of the seabed around Northern Ireland for our tidal stream resource and other offshore renewables.

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Minister for her response. The innovative SeaGen project in Strangford Lough is an indicator of how Northern Ireland can lead the way in harnessing tidal power. However, if we are to continue to do that, we will have to strike a balance between environmental concerns and energy needs. Does the Minister agree that, although we have

to find that balance, solutions must be found to get around the problem?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and

Investment: Mr Shannon raised that issue in the NIRO debate. When we visited the British-Irish Energy Council this week, Marine Current Turbines Ltd (MCT) was held up as an exemplar. I am proud that the world's first commercial marine tidal installation is in Strangford Lough, and I am glad to see it working in such a positive way. We will have to use renewable energy while being responsible for the environment in which it is produced. MCT is a good example of balancing environmental concerns and renewable energy provision. The installation was commended by Lord Hunt of Kings Heath, Minister of State in the Department of Energy and Climate Change in Westminster, who visited the project last Monday. Environmental, fisheries and other issues must be taken into consideration when looking at renewable energy. My friend the Minister of the Environment leads on the marine Bill, and all those issues will be in his mind when he introduces that legislation.

Mr Dallat: I have no particular interest in the Strangford generator. However, representing as I do a large coastal area, I wonder whether the Minister has important technical, financial and economic data to hand to show that the principle can be applied in other areas.

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and

Investment: I have just given my answer on environmental concerns. Wind power may have been uppermost in the Member's mind when he asked the question. We will continue to take on board the advice that we are given on renewable energy, whether tidal or wind-powered. MCT shows that we can make renewable energy production work in a sustainable way that benefits not just renewable energy providers and consumers but the environment as well.

3.30 pm

Executive Committee Business

Budget (No. 2) Bill: Final Stage

Debate resumed on motion:

That the Budget (No. 2) Bill [NIA 11/09] do now pass. — [The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr S Wilson).]

Mr Attwood: Before Question Time, I argued that my experience at the Stormont Hotel this morning, where the Policing Board and the PSNI outlined how to take forward the investigation into Operation Ballast, now known as Operation Stafford, brought the relevance of the devolution of policing and justice budgets and the expectations, hopes and, potentially, the frustrations that may arise into sharp relief. I made a point about the need to be mindful of protecting the policing arrangements and budget in the context of the devolution of justice and policing not to the point of ring-fencing it in perpetuity but to protect it in order to maintain confidence and deepen the new beginning of policing. In making that point, I am mindful of the ongoing attempt to reconfigure the Patten architecture and policing arrangements.

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

An attempt was made to reconfigure Patten's proposals though what was known as a protocol on policing architecture. The significance of that for the Budget Bill is that, if that protocol had prevailed, it would have rebalanced the power between the Policing Board and the justice and policing Committee and the power between the Committee and the Minister in a way that would have affected the spending priorities and accountability of the budget. That protocol would have created an opportunity, with a Budget Bill every year — as there should be but is not in this Executive — to create new priorities and strategies around the spend of that money in a way that would have damaged the Patten architecture. The potential of the policing architecture protocol to reconfigure those relationships was undone through the efforts of the SDLP, aided and assisted by the Policing Board and, critically, two Patten commissioners: Peter Smith QC and Maurice Hayes, who made comment to the board. One of them went on

to make public comment about the situation. Remember what that protocol tried to do: it tried to recreate the old relationship between a Minister of home affairs and a Chief Constable that served this part of Ireland so ill for so many years. It tried to give many of the powers of the Policing Board to a justice Committee. It would have obliged a Chief Constable to implement policies laid down by a Committee and a Minister. That is completely contrary to best practice and to the Patten proposals.

Fortunately, much of that protocol has been amended. It still contains errors and risks, particularly by stating that the Policing Board has to have regard to objectives and priorities set by the Justice Minister. The word “priorities” is foreign to the Patten report on policing and to the two police Acts. It has not been in use since the Policing Board was established eight or nine years ago. However, at the moment when the error of the policing architecture protocol had been adjusted, elements in the British system — and it is the British system — reintroduced a concept that the policing world of Northern Ireland has not had sight or sound of for the past 10 years. Introducing the word “priorities” into the protocol — a word that is not referred to in law, in practice or in any chapter or paragraph of the Patten report — led to the potential for a Minister or a Committee to dabble in the policing budget that would arise from the devolution of justice and policing powers in a way contrary to what has best served the North over the past years.

I put down the marker that if we are unable to get that word erased from the draft protocol, and a situation prevails in which people use and abuse it over the next period in an effort to influence the spending of the police budget, the SDLP will resist it.

One reason why I make that point is that when policing and justice powers and the accompanying budget are devolved on 12 April 2010, the Minister of Justice will be served by a permanent secretary and directors of policing and justice who, as far as I am aware — no one has denied it — will be the same people who occupy the equivalent posts in the Northern Ireland Office. Some of the devolved money will be allocated to the salaries and wages of senior staff who occupy senior NIO posts and who, at the moment of devolution, will change titles and become the Department of Justice's

permanent secretary and, I understand, four senior directors.

On a number of occasions, the SDLP has, in correspondence with the First Minister and the deputy First Minister and during the debate on amendments to the Department of Justice Bill on the Floor of the Chamber, flagged up that concern. Following the devolution of policing and justice powers and the passage of the Budget Bill, the people receiving the senior salaries will be the same people who currently occupy the equivalent posts in the NIO. An issue such as justice and policing requires the highest level of transparency. The newly devolved Department of Justice's permanent secretary and directors should have been and, indeed, should still be recruited independently.

The people who occupy those jobs in the NIO are fully entitled to apply for the posts in the Department of Justice. They may have the relevant qualifications and succeed. I know one or two of them well and have some regard for them — I mean that generously — and, indeed, I am due to meet them tomorrow. However, the critical officials in the Department of Justice on 12 April will be the same officials who held the equivalent positions on 11 April, 11 March and for a long period previously. That is not the right way to handle the matter.

The SDLP wrote to the First Minister and deputy First Minister to ask that they revisit the issue of senior staffing in the Department of Justice, create an open recruitment competition for those senior posts and second people from non-governmental organisations. The request was made in order to increase transparency and to build confidence, both matters that the Policing Board discussed today in connection with a critical case inquiry.

Curiously, in the third week of January 2010, the then Acting First Minister, Arlene Foster, and the deputy First Minister replied that they would not revisit the issue and queried why they should, because the same process was followed by all Departments when powers were devolved all those years ago. That is wrong. Given that past issues and concerns about the Northern Ireland Office led some people, including Members, to refer to its staff as *securocrats*, the devolution of the functions of the Northern Ireland Office is a very different matter from the devolution of the functions of the other Departments.

We repeat that confidence in the devolution of policing and justice powers and the accompanying budget would be higher if there was an open recruitment competition for senior staff in the Department of Justice. We have reservations about the fact that the people who occupy the five senior posts in the NIO will be transplanted to the new Department at the moment of devolution on 12 April 2010. The Minister, who is responsible ultimately for overall recruitment practice in the devolved arrangements, might want to consider that and comment on it.

Yesterday, the Finance Minister referred to what the SDLP was talking about as a “wish list”, and he commented about that earlier. After all the delay and all the issues that arose on the devolution of justice, it was timely and highly appropriate for Members of the House — it seemed to be primarily, if not exclusively, SDLP Members — to comment on what shape the nature and character of devolved justice might take. That does not amount to a wish list.

In any case, if the Minister reads the debate, he will find that many of the comments made by SDLP Members were about, for example, the Public Prosecution Service and the Prison Service. In total, the budget lines for those two institutions at the point of devolution will be £200 million, out of an overall budget of £1,400 million. The SDLP identified in notional terms the potential for savings of £30 million, £40 million or £50 million, through better management of money in the Prison Service alone. That is not a wish list; it is looking at the hard cash spent on the devolved arrangements for policing and justice and arguing the case for higher levels of efficiency and effectiveness and the application of modern employment practice in the Prison Service.

That should all be music to the Minister's ears. In the next number of months, he will have to carry into this Chamber the bad news about the overall block grant. The SDLP was inviting the Minister, at the point of devolution of justice, to encourage the Minister of Justice, the Committee and the Executive to look at ways and means of managing moneys in a much more efficient, effective and better manner. That is not wishful thinking; it is developing a serious conversation, which nobody else in the Chamber, virtually without exception, tried to develop in yesterday's Budget debate.

I am at a loss to explain that. The Finance Minister is setting things up, and there is an evidence base from outside the political system showing how things can be done better. There is nearly consensus in the Chamber on dealing with cost and management issues in the Prison Service, and I say that without prejudice to the grave experience of many prison officers in the past. I commented on that matter yesterday, and the DUP took it up earlier. That is an invitation to the Minister. The potential for boring into and probing those issues, at the point of devolution and quickly thereafter, might be missed. Given that we want the character of the devolution of justice to be of a higher standard than devolution generally has been to date, it would be a great opportunity missed.

The most curious thing about the debates yesterday and today is the apparent silence of a lot of Members and far too many parties, which echoes around this Chamber. If one examines the Hansard report, one is forced to conclude that this debate, of all the Budget debates, has had the single least participation across the parties and Members of the Assembly. Consider the Budget debate of 13 January 2009, in which there was a wide range of Members speaking from across the party divide, including four contributors each from the DUP and Sinn Féin. Earlier that day, in a different Budget debate, there were three Members speaking from the DUP and three from the UUP. In a Budget debate on 12 February 2008 —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. Please stay on the subject of the debate, namely the Bill, and not how people spoke in previous debates.

3.45 pm

Mr Attwood: The point, and this is my concluding point, is that, looking at the evidence, Budget debates have excited Members and agitated comment, and rightly so, because one of the Chamber's primary functions, hopefully at least every year but perhaps not so, is to pass a Budget for the Northern Ireland Executive to administer services for people and communities in the North.

Mrs Long: Would one reason perhaps be that this is, as others have acknowledged, an inherited Budget? Therefore, the ability to influence it in the way that the Member suggests is not so acute at this time.

Mr Attwood: I find that, too, a curious point from the Alliance Party, as it has been one of the advocates of the Hillsborough arrangements, two pages of which deal with what a devolved Department of Justice might or might not do. I heard Mrs Long's party leader welcome that document and refer to those sections in the Hillsborough arrangements that talk about what a Department of Justice might do.

It is thoughtless folly to put down on a piece of paper what a Department or an addendum to the Programme for Government might do. It is thoughtless folly for Mr Ford, half an hour ago, to berate the Ulster Unionist Party for its failure to deal with the policies and practices of what might arise in the event of the devolution of justice. That, Mrs Long, through you, Mr Deputy Speaker, is in the Hansard report. It is folly to berate people for their lack of policies and practices, yet to sit silent when we have an opportunity, through a Budget Bill debate, to discuss what policies and practices might be put in place.

You may want to say —

Dr Farry: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Can I clarify that this is a Budget Bill, discussing finance, not a debate on policy?

Mr Attwood: Again, I find that a curious remark, because Mr Farry's party leader, discussing that very matter within my hearing before Question Time, berated another party for its failure to discuss policies and practices. If you look at Mr Ford's speech before Question Time, you will discover that he at least tried to talk about policies and practices. So, there we have it: the party leader berating the Ulster Unionists for a failure to discuss policies and practices, and Mr Farry now apparently criticising his own party leader for having discussed policies and practices as part of the Budget debate.

Mrs Long — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Attwood: Mrs Long — *[Interruption.]* Mrs Long — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. If we could come back to the subject matter, which is the Budget Bill.

Mr Attwood: The Budget Bill has to be seen in the context of the Hillsborough arrangements. We would not have a Budget Bill or the devolution of justice if it had not been for the Hillsborough arrangements that were agreed in February. Part of those arrangements, which

were welcomed by the DUP, Sinn Féin and the Alliance Party, talked about what an addendum to the Programme for Government would look like. We have been urged to look at that. Yet, when we begin to look at it, it is curious that so many in the Chamber remain silent, and that others, within even their own parties, seem confused.

A Member: *[Interruption.]*

Mr Attwood: That is what the evidence is.

Dr Farry: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Will the Chair rule that this is a Budget debate? There may be occasions when Members introduce aspects of policy when making points about finance, which is part and parcel of Budget Bill debates. However, Budget Bill debates are not wide-ranging debates on all policy matters. The formal discussion in the Chamber about an addendum to the Programme for Government will be the occasion for the full discussion of all policy matters relating to any future Department and the Executive.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Your observation is correct; the debate is on the Budget (No. 2) Bill. Please continue, Mr Attwood.

Mr Attwood: I accept your ruling, Mr Deputy Speaker. I am sure that Dr Farry will discuss that with his party leader shortly, even though that is not how he presented himself during the debate.

In any case, the political point is about why there is silence from so many parts of the Chamber on the Budget (No. 2) Bill and on how the £1.4 billion will be expended come 12 April. It is hard to speculate, but if I were to dare to do so, I would simply suggest that an attempt is being made to dampen expectations of the devolution of policing and justice powers. That is why the sections of the Hillsborough agreement that discussed what the addendum to the Programme for Government might look like referred only to the fact that those matters "could", rather than "would", be considered, never mind be acted upon. After all the issues, difficulties, turbulence, uncertainty and crises that were generated about the devolution of justice powers, I suggest to Members and to the wider community in the North that some parties have gone quiet on the matter because they do not want to raise expectations. Indeed, they are intent on dampening them.

As far as I am aware, in the Northern Ireland Office's discussions about what a devolved Justice Department might do, of the 14 issues that were identified in the Hillsborough arrangements, the big idea was that there should be a miscellaneous provisions Bill. If the Budget (No. 2) Bill passes, the height of the expectations and hopes of the community in the North for the devolution of justice powers could end up being the introduction of a miscellaneous provisions Bill that will deal with technical matters, such as County Court boundaries. If that is the case, unfortunately, like so many aspects of devolution in the past three years, the devolution of justice powers will stand indicted of failing to live up to those hopes and expectations.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel

(Mr S Wilson): I thank the Members who took part in the debate. At the start, as I looked around the Chamber, I did not take the same view as the previous Member to speak, who lamented the fact that so few Members wanted to contribute. I took heart from the fact that so few Members wanted to contribute, because we had a very long debate yesterday, when one SDLP Member after another tripped up to give their views and wish lists. I use that term again, because I know that it provokes Mr Attwood. Perhaps I will justify it later. I blame Basil McCrea, because if he had not arrived when he did, we would have reached the end of the list of Members to speak just I was about to get to my feet. He gave others an opportunity to slide into the Chamber, resulting in this protracted debate.

Anyhow —

Mr A Maskey: Now he is away.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel:

Having done the damage, he is now gone. I congratulate and thank all the stalwarts who took part in the third debate on the Budget (No. 2) Bill.

Despite what Mr Attwood said, the policing and justice budget has been well discussed over two days in the Assembly. Everyone had an opportunity to contribute, but many of the points that were made today were simply reiterations of those that were made yesterday.

Nevertheless, at the start of the debate, the Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel highlighted the Committee's disappointment that there had been no earlier

engagement with the Committee on the Budget. Of course, the whole point of devolution is to have an opportunity to scrutinise public spending. However, as the Chairperson knows well, the Budget could not have been discussed earlier, given that the decision about devolution was not taken until 9 March. That meant that there was no possibility before then to discuss a matter that was not devolved and that we had given no indication that we wished to have devolved.

Once that decision was made, I took the immediate step of making the papers available to the Committee, which, as I said earlier, I thank for its work in such a short period. I also thank the Committee for accepting that we had to go through a process of not just accelerated passage, but speed-of-light passage, as I think Mr Farry described it yesterday.

Dr Farry: Warp speed.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: Double acceleration, Ferrari-type progress has been made on the Budget (No. 2) Bill over the past two days.

I turn to the points that were raised by Alban Maginness. He said that he was heartened by the extraordinary amount of money — £1.4 billion — that was provided for devolution. However, given the list of issues that the SDLP raised yesterday and today, we could have spent twice that amount. It is an interim budget, and Mr Maginness hoped that there would be an early opportunity for our own fingerprints to be placed on the financial package that has been devolved to us, which was originally determined by decisions made by the Northern Ireland Office and its Ministers. We will have that opportunity. I have made it clear that it is an interim budget, and the first step in putting the Assembly's fingerprints on it will be when the addendum to the Programme for Government is discussed. That will provide the opportunity to look at matters on which the Assembly wishes to spend the budget. I have no doubt that debates on that matter will be long and interesting. Mr Maginness also raised the fact that pensions constituted a £400 million line in the budget and caused year-to-year uncertainty because they were part of a departmental expenditure limit allocation.

I have nobody to address. All the Ulster Unionist Members have left. After Basil McCrea did the

damage of keeping us here half the afternoon, they have all disappeared.

The difficulty with the way in which pensions were treated to date is that, every year, there was a revaluation. If that valuation changed as a result of the actuary's decisions, there was an immediate hit on the Budget. Had we not secured the necessary change and reclassification, this year's commutation costs to the policing budget would have been £37 million. The change in how the Budget was dealt with has avoided that.

Mr Maginness raised the issue of legal aid. It is now well known that the legal aid allocation will be increased by £20 million a year in the period 2009-2013 and, after that, by £14 million a year, with the opportunity to draw a further £22 million from reserves. However, he rightly made the point that that does not mean that we should be complacent. Mr Ford made the same point: we should not be complacent about dealing with areas in which legal aid is overspent in Northern Ireland compared with other parts of the United Kingdom. A number of Members have raised that issue so I hope that rather than wait until the additional funding runs out, the Assembly and the new Justice Minister will take steps to change how legal aid is managed. If that is done, we may find that legal aid does not become a drain when the financial arrangements that are being put in place come to an end.

4.00 pm

Alban Maginness also raised the issue of the redevelopment of Magilligan prison. The outline business case is being worked on currently and will be completed shortly. The Prime Minister made it quite clear in his letter that sufficient funds had been devolved to Northern Ireland to deal with the police college, the maintenance budget and capital projects, including the prison at Magilligan. All of those will be decided within the general framework of the capital spend for Northern Ireland.

In addition, the Member talked about the cost per prisoner and the disproportionate costs in Northern Ireland. He said that I took issue with that, but I did not: I accepted that the costs for prisoners in Northern Ireland were much higher than in other parts of the United Kingdom. Elements of the Prison Service have been a favourite target of the SDLP for some time. I took issue with the SDLP yesterday because the

urgency with which it felt the disproportionate costs in the Prison Service should be dealt contrasted with its much more softly-softly approach to the disproportionate costs in the legal aid budget. Perhaps that is a reflection of the background of the two SDLP Members who spoke about that, but I will not go down that road because I will be accused of all kinds of things.

Furthermore, the Member raised the issue of the training college. I pointed out yesterday that the business case is progressing but that a vital contribution is needed from the Health Department, from which £30 million of the total cost of the project is required for the Fire and Rescue Service element. Alban Maginness asked whether Prison Service training could be included in the college. It will be. Given that it will be a world-class facility and that recruitment to the police will probably drop off just as the college is being built, there will be opportunities to sell those services to other police services right across the United Kingdom and probably further afield. Given the amount of capital investment in the college, I imagine that that we would want to see revenue raised in that way.

Mr Farry raised a number of issues, including the challenges for the new Department. I would expect that the new Justice Minister will — in fact, he indicated in his speech that he will *[Laughter.]* — I refer to the Member who it is anticipated will be the new Justice Minister. There is many a slip twixt cup and lip, so we do not want to go into that too much. However, the bookies' favourite for the post of Justice Minister indicated that he wanted to look at many of the cross-cutting strategic challenges, including the kind of issues that Mr Farry raised about safer communities, access to justice, how we reduce offending, how we manage offenders and justice in the future.

Although I support those views, I want to make it very clear that I have not taken a new liberal direction. I am still of the view that we should be tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime. If that means getting at the criminals before they become criminals, we do it. If it means getting at the criminals when they become criminals, we do it. If it means getting at the criminals after they become criminals, we do it also. I wanted to make it quite clear where I stand. I do not want the liberal label to stick, because it could be very damaging to my reputation.

Mr Farry also raised the issue of female prisoner facilities. They are currently located in reasonably good accommodation at Hydebank Wood. However, the draft strategy for the management of women offenders was published for consultation a year ago and the summary of the responses was published in November 2009. That is another issue that the Justice Minister will have to consider.

There may be opportunities for innovative thinking. For example, some Members said that, if we have an opportunity to build a new prison, rather than building another version of our existing prisons, we should build smaller prisons with specialist units, which might be a better way forward.

Basil McCrea raised the issue of people still feeling that they have not had answers to events of the past. That issue may have been raised as a result of a meeting that Policing Board members attended this morning, given that the issue comprised a substantial part of Mr Attwood's speech. The Assembly will have to return to that matter, and the Department of Justice and the Policing Board will have to take a long and hard look at it. The issue probably goes beyond this budget, but I suppose that it has budgetary implications. At some stage, we must reach a point at which we ask how much of the policing budget is devoted to policing the past as opposed to policing the present and the future. Some of the ways with which the past is dealt can be costly, and, for some people and their needs, the return can be very meagre.

Mr Attwood and I have a difference of opinion on a certain issue from the past, but he has made no bones about the fact that he wishes to pursue it. He would love to keep chasing those who were involved in Special Branch, exposing, pillorying and punishing them for some of their actions. However, those were brave men and women who had to take tough decisions to ensure that lives were saved. Some of those people have visited my office, and they live with the consequences of their decisions. I am sure that there will be calls to pursue those matters and those people and to delve into what happened in the past. There will be calls for all the files on Special Branch and questions about who did what, who managed that person, what happened, what did they allow to happen, and so on. The Assembly will have to take a mature view on the question some time in the future, but I am not sure that it will change people's

views. I am not sure that it is a wise way to spend the limited resources that are available to us and to the police budget.

Basil McCrea talked about the need for certainty in police budgets and whether we should go for three-year budgets. I was glad to hear him say that because his party's economic spokesman has been one of the most strident critics of setting three-year budgets, as has his party. When questions were asked about black holes, I do not know how many times I have heard him say that there should be fundamental changes because we were not sufficiently fleet of foot and did not change the situation. However, the other wing of the Ulster Unionist Party — mind you, it has quite a number of wings — now says that there is stability in having a budget over a three-year period and that it might be a good idea. That is the point of the comprehensive spending review: we look three years ahead to allocate budgets. However, we have inherited a Budget for this year, and we have to live with it. We have decided to ring-fence it so that there is, at least, some stability.

Mr Attwood upbraided me. I know that we cannot refer too much to yesterday's debate, but we had a bit of upbraiding again today. I think that he felt that I was being disparaging, but I was not; I merely observed that the SDLP had presented a wish list. From what I remember of what was said yesterday and today, calls were made for more money to be spent on the youth justice system, prisons, and the past; Mr Maginness wanted money for the development of a new prison, and the police college. Many of those are included in the Budget, but many are additional. Mr Attwood's defence was that the SDLP was trying to be constructive and that it had identified £40 million of savings. However, what he said was that he believed that savings could be made if we brought prison costs down to what they are in the rest of the United Kingdom. As if we can simply click our fingers and say that the annual cost per prisoner is £75,000 today; tomorrow we will get it down to £35,000 or £30,000.

He knows that things do not work like that and that that is not how such changes happen; nevertheless, he identified £40 million of savings. Anybody who can find savings of 33% in a prison budget of £131 million and believe that they can be delivered quickly is engaging in fanciful thinking.

Mr Attwood: Will the Member give way?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I will give way in a minute. Of course there are savings to be made; I have made it clear that I do not believe that the current arrangement is sustainable. When we are designing new prisons we ought to look at ways of designing out some of the costly types of prison estate that we have. However, to believe that one can find that magnitude of savings instantly, as the Member suggests, is fanciful thinking. If it is fanciful thinking, the list of things on which he believed £40 million could be spent is a wish list.

Mr Attwood: The Minister has to accept that there is a slight contradiction between what he said today and what he said yesterday. Yesterday, he complimented me on being one of the few Members who said that savings could be made, as that was a good thing. However you criticise the SDLP today for calling for more money to be spent on prisons. The two do not mix. The Minister is losing the run of himself. I was cautious about saying £30 million, £40 million or £50 million. Yesterday, I said that that figure was set cautiously; today I said that it was notional. The point is that you, Minister, accept the principle that there are savings to be made. Regardless of whether they can be achieved over three, five or 10 years, you have conceded the principle. Therefore Minister, in notional terms, what do you think the savings could be?

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

Mr Attwood: Through the Chair, Mr Deputy Speaker, do you think that it is feasible — *[Laughter.]*

Over a 10-year period, for instance, is it or is it not the case that you could get the cost per prisoner per year down to the figure in Britain? Is that or is that not a feasible outcome? It is a debate that we should have. It is interesting that the Minister accepts that there are savings to be made. Therefore what will he, as Minister of Finance and Personnel, the Executive and the incoming Justice Minister do to live up to that principle?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: Mr Deputy Speaker, as you have pointed out, you do not think at all. By referring matters through the Chair, the Member should be speaking to the Minister and not to you, because, when sitting in

the Chair, you do not have an opinion on any of the issues being debated.

4.15 pm

Anyhow, first of all, I did not compliment the Member. Believe me; I rarely compliment him. Had I done so, I am sure that I would remember. During the debate yesterday, I observed that he had said that there would be savings of £40 million. He did not identify where those savings would come from or how long it would take to achieve them, other than to reduce the cost of detaining each prisoner by half over a period of time.

However, he made it clear in his speech today that he expects all of the savings that he hopes for under the new direction for policing and justice to be delivered quickly. Now, he says that it may take some time for savings to materialise. To want instant spending on all of these things, and to suggest that savings, the magnitude of which we do not know, could be made over a period of time, is to present a wish list. It is not deliverable. As he said, savings will be delivered over a long period, yet he admits that he wants a list of things that the SDLP has talked about to be delivered quickly — because, he said, people expect that. Therefore, I believe that I am justified in saying that there is a wish list.

Dr Farry: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way. Perhaps I will complicate things a little further. I do not necessarily disagree with Mr Attwood's point about the challenge of reducing the cost per prisoner in the prison system within a relatively short period. We have to address that. I want to make the point to the Minister that there will not simply be one-way traffic on that issue. Prisons will have additional cost pressures.

I will mention two particular examples. There is an ongoing pressure with regard to mental health services in the prison system, which may have to be channelled through health rather than through the prison system necessarily. In the near future, the Assembly will also have to face up to the provision of forensic psychology services in the prison system. That arises from the Criminal Justice (Northern Ireland) Order 2008, which introduced public-protection sentences and extended and indeterminate custodial sentences. The onus is on the state to provide the infrastructure to allow prisoners to demonstrate that they are suitable for release

into the community. That investment has not yet been made in the prison system. However, it may become an inescapable pressure. There may well be implications under the European human rights regime.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel:

Obviously, the Member has done a lot of study on this. I accept his point. Usually, his points have some validity. There will be pressures, some of which will, of course, be new. That is one reason why the Assembly must think about how exactly it will deliver the Prison Service.

Mr Attwood's next point was about threats to the police budget. He noted that I had indicated that the Executive would have to make a decision quickly on the Assembly and Executive Review Committee's view on whether the budget should be ring-fenced. I think that it would be sensible to ring-fence it for the current year. However, it should not be ring-fenced for ever. Yesterday, I explained the dangers of doing that.

Mr Attwood suggests that the danger of not ring-fencing that budget is that it could be nibbled away. I must say that, having listened to contributions from both the Alliance Party and the SDLP, I believe that there is potential for the budget to be nibbled away anyway. If those parties want to see greater partnership and co-operation with other Departments, and they tell them to take on functions that, perhaps, identify offenders early in order to make savings in the justice budget, the likely implications are, of course, that those Departments will want recompense for taking on that extra work.

Those are the kinds of issues that the Assembly will have to look at when it scrutinises the next Budget for Northern Ireland, which, let us not forget, will include money for all Departments. Whether that means that the budget will be nibbled away or parts of it will be directed in different ways, people can describe it in whatever way they wish.

I have already mentioned this point so I am not going to emphasise it again, but I think that it would be very wrong of us to decide that we want large proportions of the Budget to go on policing the past, as opposed to meeting the expectations that people have for a proper policing service in their communities in the present.

I felt as though I had gone back to my days on the Policing Board when, as soon as the name

Patten was mentioned, a shiver went down my spine. I remember the five years that I spent on the Policing Board, when we discovered that, to use the term coined by one of his own colleagues, Alex is a "Patten purist". Once Alex Attwood started getting into Patten, protocols, how the word "priority" is so important and how the SDLP would vigorously defend it, I thought about how glad I am that I am no longer on the Policing Board, because I remember those debates about the defence of Patten.

We just have to accept that Patten reported over 10 years ago and that we have got to move on; policing has moved on, and I hope that the Member will not get stuck in a Patten rut. I was not even aware of the issue that he was talking about, but I am sure that the new Justice Minister, whomever that may be, will be given a long lecture on the benefits of Patten and the dangers of any deviation from Patten, even though there have been quite a few deviations in the meantime and the policing world has not fallen apart. Indeed, some people would say that it has improved as a result of those deviations.

I have dealt with most of the points that Members raised during the debate. As I pointed out, some of those are policy issues, some are operational issues that will be dealt with by the Chief Constable, and some are issues that will be dealt with by the Policing Board. I believe that we have, at least, taken an important step today; the second important step. On 9 March, we agreed that we wanted to have the powers devolved. Today, I hope and expect that we will agree that the money that is required to deliver the powers that we wish to see devolved will be available to the Justice Minister. Of course, the next step will be to identify the person who is going to take on that responsibility and get on with the job.

Mr Maginness made the point that this is a good step because it shows that the Assembly is reaching another level of maturity, because we can deal with these issues. It completes the devolution picture, and I believe that it will lead to better operation of the Assembly. I am sure that we will have contentious debates about policing and justice because those issues, by their very nature, will generate such debate. That is not necessarily a bad thing. If those debates are conducted in the way in which the debates over the past two days have been conducted, they will lead to a better

understanding of where each party comes from and a better understanding of the issues involved in policing and justice. I ask the House to support the Bill.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Before we proceed to the Question, I remind Members that, as it is a Budget Bill, the motion requires cross-community support.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

That the Budget (No. 2) Bill [NIA 11/09] do now pass.

Motion made:

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

Adjournment

North Down: Housing for Pensioners and People with Disabilities

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Members that the proposer of the topic will have 15 minutes in which to speak. All other Members who wish to speak will have approximately seven minutes.

Mr Easton: I welcome the opportunity to raise this issue in the House. It has been in the public domain for some time, yet we still await answers. I am referring, of course, to the multi-element improvement scheme to upgrade many one-bedroom bungalows on the Bloomfield estate in Bangor. The Minister visited the Bloomfield estate last summer, and I thank her for going to view the conditions in which many pensioners live.

At present, the houses can only be described as being old and unfit for pensioners and people with disabilities to inhabit. The homes are inefficient to heat, and they are damp and cold. The people who live in them, some of whom are aged 80 and over, should not be living in such conditions.

The improvement scheme that is in the pipeline was envisaged in 2003. Every year for the past seven years, residents have packed up and been ready to move so that the scheme can begin, but, every year, they have received letters to inform them that the work schedule is not going ahead. Residents are again packing and tidying up their household possessions in preparation for moving at the last minute. One wonders whether the move will happen this year. As Members will appreciate, residents are growing increasingly frustrated and angry about how they are being treated. The situation is quite appalling.

On 14 January, in response to a question for written answer, the Minister informed me that work is scheduled to start in September this year. However, the response came with a get-out clause: the work will depend on funding. I ask that the Minister make it her priority for the next financial year, as residents are getting extremely

annoyed at and stressed by the seven-year wait. They have been forced to live in conditions that would appal Members.

In January 2009, the Minister said that, as a result of a £25 million shortfall in the housing budget, the scheme was one of 85 that would be held back, with only 16 schemes proceeding. She informed us:

“the Housing Executive aims to undertake its full schedule of work and to commence all schemes in its programmes at the earliest opportunity.” — [Official Report, Bound Volume 36, pWA461].

Since then, her Department and the Housing Executive have been in receipt of an additional £20 million from the Minister of Finance and Personnel, Mr Wilson, for housing maintenance. The Minister for Social Development announced an extra £6 million, also for housing maintenance, in November 2009. Where is the money being spent, and is there any funding to implement the multi-element improvement scheme, which has been seven years in the making?

A resident who lives in one of the bungalows on the Bloomfield estate was quoted in the Bangor ‘Spectator’ as saying that he was cheesed off with the whole thing, with draughts coming through his windows and doors, and that it was getting harder and more expensive to heat his place. Another resident said that he was spending £25 a week on heating his one-bedroom bungalow, because his window frames were made of wood and were full of holes. People, especially the elderly, should not be forced to live in those conditions or wait so long for the improvement scheme.

Mr Cree and Mr McFarland have been called away to an urgent Ulster Unionist Party meeting, and I was asked to apologise for their non-attendance.

Will the Minister please move on the scheme as soon as possible? Disabled and elderly residents have been waiting for far too long. I know that the Minister cares, as she has been to see the residents, and I appreciate that. However, I hope that, showing some compassion, she will announce that the scheme will go ahead this year.

Dr Farry: I thank Alex Easton for securing the Adjournment debate, which is of particular concern to the community in north Down.

I also recognise the efforts of the Bloomfield Community Association, particularly its chairperson, Robert Hopps, who has been very vocal in keeping the issue alive. I know that, like me, all my MLA colleagues have been in touch with the Minister on the issue to try to keep the scheme alive and to ensure that we get closure on it.

4.30 pm

The infrastructure of those houses is very old and, as Alex Easton said, the insulation in the houses is particularly poor and as a consequence, the heating bills are very high. Also, the form of heating in the houses is inefficient. I think a lot of them are using Economy 7, which, as we all know, is far from the most effective heating method, never mind the most effective in relation to cost.

I appreciate the financial situation that the Minister is in. We are all in a very difficult financial situation in the current context. I also recognise that the Minister is committed to addressing social housing in Northern Ireland, and I welcome her visit to Bloomfield last year to look at this. My staff joined that visit to see how things were going. I ask the Minister to do what is possible to ensure that we follow through with the commitment that has been made with respect to the scheme going ahead in September this year.

Particularly in relation to old people, it is not just the situation that they are in that causes difficulty, it is often the uncertainty. Some people say that they can live with the poor situation, but it is almost the hope that kills. There is a sense that people constantly have their expectations raised only to be dashed. That is a very difficult situation for people to engage with at a psychological level.

I ask the Minister to keep under constant review — as I am sure that she does — the correct balance of the funding that is available to her in relation to the choices to be made between newbuilds and improvements to the existing social housing stock, and to think through what is the most effective way of spending the scarce resources that are available in order to make the greatest impact on the greatest number of people in the public interest. She should also bear in mind that there is potential employment for people on the back of the multi-improvement scheme and any other schemes across Northern Ireland that the Minister is

able to take forward. That should be part of our consideration.

I appreciate that there is a lot of concern about fuel poverty in Northern Ireland. As we all know, we have the highest incidence of that in the United Kingdom. This is a very clear and tangible example of that fuel poverty, and one for which there is a ready-made solution available to us. It is there, and all we need is the confirmation that the money will be provided by the Department to enable it to go ahead. I join with my colleagues from North Down in urging the Minister to give that the formal go-ahead during the forthcoming financial year.

Mr Weir: At the outset, I thank my colleague Alex Easton for putting forward the topic for debate, and the Business Committee for selecting it. Looking across the Chamber, it is clear that this is one of those occasions when, as my and the Minister's colleague Jim Wells would say, we are speaking to a hushed Assembly, judging by the vast crowds that are here. I am sure that it is purely coincidental that those remaining in the Public Gallery cleared out in the middle of Mr Farry's speech. Nevertheless it is a very important subject, and a grave one for those involved.

I am sure that my colleagues would agree that, over the years, there have been a lot of improvements many of the estates in North Down. They have come on in leaps and bounds due to a combination of the hard work of statutory agencies such as the Housing Executive and the valuable work that has been done by community representatives on the ground in trying to improve various areas. In a broad sense, the debate should, therefore, be set against a good general landscape. However, there appears to be an outstanding issue relating to the housing stock in Bloomfield. Recently, I posed a question to the Minister about the number of houses in Northern Ireland that are considered to be not up to standard. Analysis showed that the vast bulk of those houses are in the private sector.

This case concerns houses that are part of the public sector. The Minister has shown a personal interest in the matter, and all Members for North Down thank her for that. The schemes are for the most vulnerable people. They are not simply for people who live in public sector housing but people who are elderly and who have disabilities. As Mr Easton said, one of the

essential problems for people has been a sense of frustration that they have constantly felt that something is on the verge of happening. Every time that they see light at the end of the tunnel, it seems that somebody builds more tunnel. Consequently, there is a concern that there is a constant delay.

We would all like more money, particularly for housing. Although much of the emphasis has been on newbuild housing, it is important that we ensure that sufficient balance is given to the maintenance of housing, particularly in the case of vulnerable people and elderly people. If the scheme were to go ahead in Bloomfield, it could make a significant difference to the lives of pensioners there.

I mentioned that the Minister has taken a degree of interest in the issue. I understand that she has secured the candidacy for the SDLP in South Down. She has indicated that, if she wins — as is likely — and is returned as the MP for South Down, there is the potential that she will vacate her ministerial post and make way for one of her colleagues. In one sense, therefore, she hopes that her days as Minister are numbered. If that is the case, I hope that she sees Bloomfield as Margaret Ritchie's legacy to Bangor. It would show her concrete commitment to, and her compassion for, Bloomfield.

I appreciate that this has been a short debate, but we are all united in wanting to see improvements for people, particularly the people of Bloomfield. Therefore, I hope that the Minister can bring some good news on her legacy for the people of Bangor in her closing remarks.

The Minister for Social Development (Ms

Ritchie): I thank Mr Easton, Dr Farry and Mr Weir for their contributions. I particularly thank Mr Easton for bringing the Adjournment debate to the Floor of the House. I welcome the opportunity to take part in the debate, not least because it gives me the chance to clarify some of the issues that were raised. I will try to address all the issues that the three Members raised. I will study Hansard, and if I find that I have left any questions unanswered, I will write directly to the Member concerned.

By now, no Member will be unaware of the shortfall in the housing budget that has been suffered as a result of the collapse of the land and property market. The fact that so much of

my budget was predicated on land and property sales meant that it was inevitable that the downturn in the market would have a more savage impact on housing than elsewhere. The impact was greater on housing than on other sectors and on other Departments. Between last year and this year, the housing budget suffered a loss of up to £200 million. I have been asked to find a further £30 million in savings next year.

As a member of the Committee for Social Development, Mr Easton will be well aware of the state of the housing budget for this year and next year. I am conscious that Mr Easton has been particularly assiduous in pursuing me with questions about detailed constituency matters, and I have tried to provide answers with due reference to all the matters that he has raised. Ultimately, the outcome of the budgetary difficulties has affected the delivery of those multi-element improvement schemes, one of which we are debating today. I was happy to accept an invitation from Mr Easton to visit the pensioners' bungalows on the Bloomfield estate in July 2009. Back then, I asked the Housing Executive to consider some interim measures, and I am pleased that work is expected to begin on replacing a retaining wall at Ballyree Drive this summer. If the scheme cannot proceed, the Housing Executive will consider other incremental work on the bungalows.

I do not doubt that a multi-element improvement scheme would help to transform those homes. After all, everyone deserves to live in a decent home. Mr Easton may be interested to know that, in the past 10 years, my Department has invested heavily to ensure that that is the case. We have reduced the levels of housing unfitness, which is an issue that Mr Weir mentioned, from 4.9% in 2001 to just 2.4% this year. In the past five years alone, we invested almost £1 billion to maintain stock. This year, despite the difficulties in the housing budget, we will invest almost £170 million to maintain homes. My Department is, therefore, upgrading, repairing and looking after the housing stock.

However, I am sure that the two DUP members who spoke in the debate, Mr Easton and Mr Weir, will be more than happy to ask the Finance Minister for the money to ensure that I meet those shortfalls and cater for the needs of their constituents and those of many more people throughout Northern Ireland who have similar

problems. I am sure that that will be their legacy to the Assembly and to their constituents.

All of us must prioritise our spending to ensure that every pound that we invest makes the biggest possible impact in helping those in greatest need and protecting the vulnerable. As the quality of the stock improves, I want to do what we can to increase its quantity. Members will be interested to know that we are on track this year to deliver the largest number of new homes for a decade. My Department's approach is, therefore, to increase the quality and quantity of the stock.

The recent Savills report, which we debated here some weeks ago, provides me with the evidence base to take that forward. The authors of the report were highly impressed with the quality of the Housing Executive stock. In fact, they found that stock to be the best that they had ever surveyed. They also referred specifically to the programme of multi-element improvement schemes and suggested a new approach to how those could be delivered. The new approach involves — this is a potential solution of which Members should take heed — the transfer of unimproved stock to a housing association that can fund the necessary improvements by introducing private finance, thus removing the need for significant public investment. I am content to test that novel approach with a pilot scheme, and with the support of the Housing Executive, that is exactly what we are doing in Derry. If that scheme is successful, it could open up new opportunities and provide us with the necessary template. It is certainly worth exploring further. However, a tenant vote in favour is integral to any such process. Given that such tenant support is required, tenants have nothing to fear, because they will control the eventual outcome.

Although the topic for today's Adjournment debate relates specifically to schemes in one constituency, similar multi-improvement schemes for almost 3,000 homes across Northern Ireland have had to be put on hold. It is not simply a case of finding £3.5 million for the 71 bungalows on the Bloomfield estate. Across North Down, some 224 homes await that sort of improvement work, the cost of which is £10 million. I do not blame Mr Easton, Mr Weir or Dr Farry for restricting their concerns solely to North Down. However, as the Minister for Social Development, I must look at the bigger picture. The resources are simply not

there to proceed with those schemes anywhere in Northern Ireland at the moment, never mind in North Down. However, I am examining the potential solution offered in the Savills report. I will be able to convey the outcome of that examination to those Members. The scheme requires Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) approval as well as tenant approval and participation, but I hope that it will provide the template. If it works out, we could, subject to the participation of housing associations in other areas, roll it out. That would alleviate the difficulty and is perhaps something to look forward to and to hang our hats on.

4.45 pm

Alex asked me what happened to the £20 million that was allocated this year by the Minister of Finance and Personnel. DFP gave me £20 million in capital, £5 million of which was for disabled adaptations and £15 million of which was for private sector grants. However, that was conditional on my releasing £20 million for Egan contractors for replacement heating schemes and for kitchens and bathrooms. It was all revenue funding. I released the funding by careful management of other budgets, but there was no money available within that for multi-element improvement schemes.

Stephen Farry asked whether the scheme will go ahead in September 2010. I go back to the fact that we are exploring other options around how we deal with multi-element improvement schemes. Therefore, I ask Members to bide their time a little longer until we see how we can operate the scheme. Of course, on the other side of the coin, if the Minister of Finance and Personnel was feeling extremely generous when allocating the housing budget, as, I have no doubt, his DUP colleagues on the Benches opposite would very happily encourage him to be, that would alleviate some of my problems.

Peter Weir did a bit of crystal-ball gazing. Naturally, I liked the look of what he saw and its possible outcome for South Down.

Mr Weir: Jim Wells will want to talk to you.

The Minister for Social Development: I am sure that he will not.

Notwithstanding, I am conscious of the need to maintain Housing Executive properties. However, I remain steadfast in my priority to provide new homes. With a large number of

people on the waiting list and the need to address the large number of singles on it, there is always a rationale for decisions that are made, for strategies that are produced, and for programmes that roll out as a result. Mr Weir also referred to the private rented strategy. I am launching that strategy tomorrow, and it will bring forward new ways of dealing with a large section of housing that is provided in the social sector, albeit through the private rented sector. We have to deal with the regulation of that.

I say again: if the Minister of Finance and Personnel would provide me with additional resources, I would certainly consider additional capital works in the areas of greatest need. I implore the Minister's colleagues, when they are talking to him tonight before he leaves for Northern Ireland Question Time in the House of Commons tomorrow, to ask him to consider giving us extra money to cater for the number of people, throughout Northern Ireland, who require multi-element improvement schemes.

Once again, I thank the Member who tabled the Adjournment debate for the opportunity to respond, and I thank him and his two colleagues for their contributions. There is no doubt that we live in challenging, changing and financially difficult times and that difficult choices have to be made. I am doing all that I can to make the scarce resources that are available to me go as far as they possibly can. Where resources are not available, I am prepared to consider a radical and new approach. Possibly, that is where we can hang our hats. That is exactly the approach that we have taken in Derry, and I will keep Members fully apprised as that pilot scheme moves forward. I would greatly appreciate any support that they and their colleagues can give to the pilot scheme as an alternative to expediting and alleviating problems to do with multi-element improvement schemes.

Adjourned at 4.49 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 12 April 2010

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Speaker's Business

Mr Speaker: I am sure that I speak for the entire House when I express my deepest sympathy to the Polish people following the tragic death of their president. I am sure that Members and staff will wish to record messages of support in the book of condolence that will be available in the Great Hall until the close of business today.

Executive Committee Business

Budget (No.2) Bill: Royal Assent

Mr Speaker: I inform Members that the Budget (No. 2) Bill has received Royal Assent. The Budget (No.2) Act (Northern Ireland) 2010 became law on 26 March 2010.

Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill: Royal Assent

Mr Speaker: I inform Members that the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill has received Royal Assent. The Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act (Northern Ireland) 2010 became law on 26 March 2010.

Assembly Business

Suspension of Standing Orders

Lord Morrow: I beg to move

That Standing Orders 10(2) to 10(4) be suspended for 12 April 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 12 April 2010.

Mr Speaker: As the motion has been agreed, today's sitting may go beyond 7.00 pm, if required.

Matters of the Day

Car Bomb at Palace Barracks

Mr Speaker: Mr Alban Maginness has sought leave to make a statement on a matter that fulfils the criteria set out in Standing Order 24. I shall call Mr Maginness to speak for up to three minutes on the subject. I will then call representatives from each of the other political parties, as agreed with the Whips. Those Members will also have up to three minutes in which to speak. There will be no opportunity for interventions, questions or votes on the matter, and I will not take any points of order until the item of business is concluded. If that is clear, we shall proceed.

Mr A Maginness: I rise to speak about the bombing that took place at Palace Barracks early this morning. I am sure that all Members share the view that the attack must be condemned outright. The explosion was potentially lethal and was heard right across Belfast. One assumes that the bomb was intended to kill. The Real IRA has claimed responsibility for that dastardly act and should be condemned. It was a provocative act and was designed to create embarrassment on the day of the new Justice Minister's election. It was designed to disrupt and undermine the political process in the House. Therefore, it should be condemned by all of us here today.

I sympathise in particular with the people who were disrupted by the bomb and whose lives were put in danger. I also sympathise with the taxi driver who was apprehended by the people responsible for the attack and forced to drive the bomb to its destination early this morning. There was no regard for his human rights or his profession.

The people responsible have learnt nothing from the Troubles. They wish to recreate the futile campaigns of the past. We all know about the Provisional IRA's futile and disastrous campaign. The people responsible for last night's attack should learn the lessons from that and come to their senses. If one reads the recently published book containing interviews with Brendan Hughes, one can see a man who was dedicated to armed action. In the conclusion of that book, Hughes says that the struggle was futile, that the violence was futile and that it was not worth losing one life for. Let those who perpetrated last night's attack learn from those remarks.

Finally, there should be an effective police response to the action that took place early this morning. A resolute police response should be undertaken. The creation of strong politics in this House and of a strong bond of partnership and goodwill among all parties in the House and between both communities are what will really undermine the intentions of the perpetrators of last night's attack. We should all dedicate ourselves to those goals.

Mr Weir: I associate myself with the remarks that have just been made and add to the universal condemnation of a despicable act by evil men who are trying to drag Northern Ireland back to a past of death and destruction. We must ensure that those people do not succeed.

It is clear that the intent of last night's attack was to cause widespread death and destruction, and we must be thankful that that was thwarted and that no one died. The intent was clearly one of callous disregard not simply for the lives of members of the security forces but for the residents of Holywood. I join Alban Maginness in praising the fortitude of the people of Holywood for their resolve and resistance. Despite experiencing some inconvenience due to the Real IRA, the people of Holywood and north Down stand unbowed.

The intentions behind the attack are clear, and its timing was no accident. The attack was clearly meant as a signal of opposition to the progress that we have been making in Northern Ireland, particularly the devolution of policing and justice. Although there has been a wide range of debates on that subject, we should unite today as democrats to send a clear signal across the board that we wish to see progress in Northern Ireland, that we are united in pursuing a peaceful way forward and that we are united in providing that progress. As well as ensuring that democracy stands together to thwart these men of evil, we need to ensure that the Police Service and the security forces continue to receive the resources that they need to combat the threat. Although the people involved are small in number, last night's events and those on other occasions show that they have the potential to pose a real threat to the lives of the citizens of Northern Ireland.

I have a final message. It is clear that some people in the wider community know details of the activities of the dissident republicans and are aware of who perpetrated last night's

actions. There is an onus not only on politicians to provide leadership and on police officers to provide a security response but on the whole community to unite and pass information to the police to ensure that we are not dragged back to the past. People are trying to drag us back to the past at a time when we are trying to move Northern Ireland forward. They cannot be allowed to succeed. They will not be allowed to succeed. This House represents the future.

Mr A Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Today, the peace process will move forward in a very important way with the election of a Justice Minister who will be representative of and accountable to all Members of the House and, more importantly, to the people we collectively represent.

As Gerry Adams said this morning, the peace process has been challenged on a number of fronts. Sinn Féin absolutely rejects the activities of those who seek to bring the peace process down. Our party will continue in its efforts to provide the important positive political leadership that it has been providing. We are arguing that that has been delivering a stable political environment within which we can all pursue our political objectives. We reject outright the activities of the people who seek to bring the peace process down and take us all backwards. Thankfully, the vast majority of people have rejected those activities.

Mr Cree: Last Saturday in north Down, we had a most enjoyable day when we welcomed home members of our Royal Irish Regiment after their distinguished service in Afghanistan. I could not help but contrast those good men and women who carried out brave and courageous service in that faraway war-torn land with the low, cowardly actions of those who used a proxy bomb in an attempt to murder and maim anyone in the Palace Barracks area of Holywood. Many civilians, including children, were forced to leave their home and spend a long, uncomfortable night in the local community centre.

I sympathise with those who have suffered in any way, and I know that the House has the same view. The actions of that unrepresentative group will not be allowed to distract from the peace process or the lives of ordinary people, and it will have no effect on the devolution of policing and justice. The military will continue to be welcome in the north Down area, and MI5, which is sited in the complex — I am sure that

that is no coincidence — will undoubtedly be encouraged to take an even keener interest in the actions of those out-of-touch dissidents.

Dr Farry: I stand with my four colleagues in condemning last night's bomb attack on Palace Barracks. It was a callous attack, and its intent was, clearly, death and destruction.

Only one injury has been reported: a gentleman was blown to the ground by the force of the blast. It was sheer luck that the situation was not worse. No proper time was allowed for an evacuation. Indeed, as people were being evacuated, shrapnel rained down on them. Others were still in their homes when the bomb went off. Those who planted the bomb need to reflect seriously on the situation in which they placed themselves and the situation in which they placed an innocent taxi driver and his family from north Belfast.

12.15 pm

The incident has had an effect on the community in the Redburn area of Holywood, and on Holywood as a whole. Indeed, Palace Barracks is an integral part of that community. It was part of that community throughout the darkest days of the Troubles and will continue to be so in the future. Naomi Long and I visited Redburn Community Centre during the night and this morning. Emergency procedures have been put in place by the council and the police to deal with the aftermath of the situation. The people are, naturally, very upset about what has happened. There are concerns about family life, access to medication and the fate of people's property. It is important to send out a message that this House will not be deflected one bit from moving society forward. Those who are trying to drag us back to the past will be defeated. Through politics and through sending out a message of partnership in this Chamber today and in future, we will send out that clear message and stand shoulder to shoulder with the community in Holywood and elsewhere in Northern Ireland to ensure that the men and women of violence are sent packing.

Executive Committee Business

Welfare Reform Bill: First Stage

The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie): I beg to introduce the Welfare Reform Bill [NIA13/09], which is a Bill to amend the law relating to social security; to amend the law relating to child support; and for connected purposes.

Bill passed First Stage and ordered to be printed.

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

Ministerial Offices (Number and Functions) Determination 2010

Mr Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour 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 First Minister (Mr P Robinson): I beg to move

That the Ministerial Offices (Number and Functions) Determination 2010 be approved.

Last night's attack on Palace Barracks was an attack on our entire community. This Assembly is never better than when it is prepared to stand and face down those who would try to undermine our democratic institutions. I join the Members who have already spoken in expressing my sympathy to the taxi driver who was taken, threatened and put in the most difficult circumstances. Indeed, I pay my respects to all those residents whose lives were disrupted and who faced discomfort.

The way to deal with terrorism is, of course, by sending a clear message that the terrorists cannot win. That undermines terrorism more than anything else. Therefore, today in this Chamber, we will demonstrate the primacy of politics in Northern Ireland. There could not be a clearer contrast between those who are seeking to take Northern Ireland backwards through violence and those who are seeking to move Northern Ireland forward.

Despite the attack last night, today is clear evidence that Northern Ireland is changing. On each occasion that this Assembly has been tested, we have demonstrated a united response to those who threaten the peace and stability that has been achieved. I am confident that we will do so again today. I am sure that I speak for the whole Assembly when I say that we will not be distracted or diverted from the work that we have been elected to do here. The proper response is simply to get back to business.

The debate on this determination is another important step in the Assembly's assumption of responsibility for policing and justice functions. For the first time since 1972, Northern Ireland will have its own Department with responsibility for policing and justice matters. The House will be aware that, in line with the motion passed by the Assembly on 9 March 2010, policing and justice responsibilities have today become the responsibility of the Northern Ireland Assembly. In future, it will be this Assembly that will legislate for policing and justice matters.

Under powers that this Assembly passed last autumn, a new Department of Justice was established at the weekend. Later today, this Assembly will elect a Minister to take charge of that Department. After that process is complete, a departmental Committee will be established to scrutinise the Minister, his or her Department and its agencies. We will then have the full apparatus in place for local democratic control and accountability in respect of policing and justice.

The Northern Ireland Act 1998 requires that, when a new Department is established, a determination of ministerial responsibilities must be made by the First Minister and deputy First Minister and approved by the Assembly. It is also an essential trigger for the election of the Justice Department and Justice Minister. That is why we are jointly moving the determination.

The determination lists the Ministers of the Executive and defines their functions in having charge of the relevant Departments. That was the approach taken when the first determination was made in 1999. Although that original determination will be revoked, the functions and status of the 10 existing Executive Ministers are unaffected by the new determination. To their number is now added a Minister of Justice in charge of the Department of Justice. That

Minister takes his or her place as a full and equal member of the Executive.

At an earlier stage, concerns were expressed by some that the Justice Minister would be a second-class Minister, inferior in status to the rest of the Executive. Those fears were always completely unfounded. The Justice Minister will have the same standing in attending and voting at the Executive as other Ministers. The operation of the Department of Justice will be subject to his or her direction and control just as any other Minister is in charge of his or her Department. The deputy First Minister and I look forward to welcoming the new Minister of Justice to the next meeting of the Executive on Thursday 15 April.

With the addition of policing and justice, the range of Executive responsibilities set out in the determination will be more comprehensive and will better address the needs of our citizens. The House will be aware that the debate on the Budget (No. 2) Bill addressed the expansion of the Executive's financial responsibilities as enhanced by the Prime Minister's package of October 2009. The workforce under the control of the Executive will increase by over 5,000 staff. A vast corpus of legislation will become the responsibility of the devolved institutions. The Executive and Assembly will have the responsibility of scrutinising, reviewing and amending those laws.

Perhaps the most important implication for the Executive of today's transfer will be an enhanced capacity to address policy problems in the round. There are synergies to be developed between our work on justice, social development, good relations, education and health. I hope that the Executive will exploit that potential to the full. That will demonstrate to our people the value of devolution, local control and local accountability. Today represents another stage of Northern Ireland's moving forward to a better future.

Mr Spratt: I declare an interest as Chairperson of the Assembly and Executive Review Committee, but I stress that I am not speaking in that capacity. Members will be aware that the Committee had a long and active interest in the matter over a fairly lengthy period. As the First Minister said, the requirement to bring the determination before the House results from primary legislation governing the number of Departments that there should be in the Executive and the establishment of an

additional Department that would house the range of policing and justice functions that have been transferred. That is in keeping with the Committee's three reports on the devolution of policing and justice matters.

The functions to be exercised by the Minister and the Department have already been subject to rigorous scrutiny by the Committee and the Assembly on a number of occasions. The name of the Department is also consistent with the Committee's earlier recommendation on the matter, and that recommendation has already been approved by the Assembly.

Today is an historic day for policing and justice. After some 38 years, policing and justice will again be looked after at a local level. It proves that devolution in the Province has moved forward. This is a good day for all the people of Northern Ireland, from whichever section of the community they come. As the First Minister said, a local Minister will deal with and address the needs of local people on policing and justice issues. That Minister will work alongside the various agencies and non-public bodies in the justice system. The devolution of policing and justice powers has already received widespread approval from bodies such as the Policing Board. The Chief Constable and the Police Service have also been on record as welcoming the devolution of policing and justice powers.

It augurs well for the future of this place that all those powers are being devolved today and will be dealt with in the Assembly over the coming period. I am sure that there will be some extremely interesting debates in the days ahead. However, the people of Northern Ireland deserve to have issues dealt with locally rather than by a Minister who comes in for a couple of days a week. I commend the motion to the House.

Mr A Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. On behalf of Sinn Féin, I support the motion and welcome it as an important step forward. Of course, we do that against a backdrop of many people having said that it would never happen. I welcome the fact that we are at the point of passing a motion that will give effect to the establishment of a Department of Justice. We will appoint a Minister later today, which is an important step forward for the entire community and the politics of the jurisdiction in which we live and have responsibilities.

This is an important occasion for the whole Assembly. I hope that, under the tutelage of the incoming Minister, we will take the opportunity that is afforded to us by this move forward to have a full and informed debate on the type of criminal justice system that we want, which is one that benefits our community more than the current system does. My party has no hesitation in supporting the motion, which we believe is an important step forward. It is precisely the type of response that we need to give to the people who wish to set back the political and peace process.

It is important that we look forward to a new ministry and a new Minister who, for the first time in our history, will be representative of and accountable to all the people we represent. We must take the opportunity to debate whether we want a larger penal colony here or whether we want to put more effort and resources into working, particularly with young people, to ensure that they are prevented from moving into antisocial or petty criminal lifestyles as they grow up. Many choices have to be made in this society. The establishment of a Department and the appointment of a new Minister will give us the time and opportunity to make those fully informed choices.

Mr Kennedy: Although the Ulster Unionist Party opposed the devolution of policing and justice powers at this time for good, well-documented and, indeed, genuine reasons, we recognise that the House has taken other decisions, and, therefore, we have moved on. I am a member of the Ulster Unionist Party, which has an historic importance in the governance of Northern Ireland, and the party recognises the fact that this is, potentially, a significant day for the people of Northern Ireland. However, given the events of last night and early this morning, it is also a day on which we are mindful of the difficult security situation that the Administration face. Nevertheless, that is not and never will be a reason to walk away from democratic accountability or control.

Our concerns are based on timing and democratic accountability. A number of them remain to be dealt with. We regret that there was a lack of proper discussion and involvement of all the parties on an inclusive basis in the devolution of policing and justice. Consensus should have been sought, even at the level of the Executive, never mind that of the Assembly.

12.30 pm

In order for the Justice Minister to operate fully and properly, and with the confidence not only of this House but of the people of Northern Ireland, we seek that consensus so that, even at this late stage, we can proceed on a more inclusive basis.

Mr Attwood: The SDLP welcomes the devolution of policing and justice for two reasons. I concur with the First Minister that what we do in this Chamber to deepen politics and democracy is one of the best strategies for dealing with those who threaten them. On that ground, if on no other, people should welcome the devolution of justice.

The second ground was touched on by other Members. Across the North and in every one of our constituency offices, frustrations associated with policing and justice and fears created by disorder and a lack of justice are expressed. They should act as a catalyst for the Assembly to take forward, as fully as possible, the opportunity presented to the people of the North this afternoon.

In recent months, Members of virtually every party have spoken about how devolution has not, to date, lived up to all the hopes and needs of the citizens and communities that they represent. Mindful of that background, there is a heavy expectation in the community and a heavy responsibility on the Minister of Justice, whoever he or she may be, and on the parties in the Assembly to maximise the opportunity that the devolution of justice creates to ensure that those who live in fear of crime and who seek justice on behalf of themselves and their families have those opportunities fulfilled.

The SDLP has outlined how the justice manifesto for the next year should look. I will highlight three examples. There is a need for an overhaul of the Public Prosecution Service. The experience of victims and families, and experience in the administration of justice more generally, confirm that victims' families are not central in the communication and management of cases. They are not central when it comes to disclosure of the reasons why prosecutions fail, are dropped or are changed. That should be one of the immediate priorities for the incoming Minister. The Prison Service requires reform in both cost and character. Our judges, consistent with their independence in laying down penalties, should receive input from those in the community

with experience in deciding the right tariff for various offences. The creation of a sentencing guidelines council would achieve that.

I make a further plea. Over the past few weeks, good work has been done in protecting the Patten architecture and the delicate balance of relationships between the Justice Minister, the Justice Committee, the Policing Board and the Chief Constable, but there will inevitably be a further opportunity for one or two people in the Chamber who are tempted or ambitious to reformulate the delicate architecture of the Patten report. Members should deny them the opportunity to do so. We should live with that which has worked so well over the past 10 years. In the experience of the people in the North, the work of the Policing Board and the transformation of policing are still unfinished.

The SDLP will work with the Minister of Justice, whoever he or she may be, to bring about, in particular, fast and deep change to justice policy and law in the North. In one way, this is the last speech that I and the SDLP will make on this phase of the justice debate.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

Mr Attwood: I thought that that would get a warm welcome from some of the Members opposite.

Devolution of justice leaves a bad taste in the mouth of 105,000 nationalists who voted for the SDLP in the last Assembly election. They, like many others throughout this society who struggled and campaigned for equality and inclusion during the years of conflict and the years since, have a bad taste in their mouth, because 105,000 people do not have equality, the rights and the democratic inclusion to which other Members of the House are entitled.

Dr Farry: The Alliance Party welcomes the motion. It is an important and critical step in finalising the devolution of policing and justice, and is, indeed, perhaps the penultimate step that we are to take, with the final step being taken later this afternoon.

The devolution of policing and justice powers occurred at midnight. Clearly, this is a momentous occasion for Northern Ireland, and it is the biggest change to the devolved settlement in the past 12 years. Indeed, policing and justice was so contentious that it could not be transferred at the time of the making of the Good Friday

Agreement, and it was central to the collapse of the old Stormont regime in 1972. That gives a sense of the importance of what the Assembly is achieving today.

We now have control over resourcing and policymaking with respect to justice matters, with accountability for decisions and issues that need to be taken forward in local hands. It is important that the Minister of Justice be a full member of the Executive. It is also important that any incumbent Minister can fight the corner for justice around the Executive table with respect to resources or access to legislation, and that justice aspects can be taken into consideration when the Executive are taking collective decisions on other issues.

Most critically, perhaps, we now have new opportunities for better joined-up government with regard to justice. Better services and outcomes for the people of Northern Ireland will not be delivered simply by a new Minister sitting in a silo. Those are the responsibilities of the entire Executive, with many other Departments able to bring their own proposals, commitments and resources to the table so that we can have better collective outcomes for a safer community and justice for the entire community. In doing so, we will deliver things on a more efficient and effective basis financially and socially through better outcomes for people.

A Minister who is elected by a cross-community vote will have considerable legitimacy from the Assembly in what he or she will want to do over the months to come. Indeed, the Minister will be working to a new addendum to a Programme for Government that sets out in detail not only the proposals from a new Minister of Justice, on which our party has done substantial work in recent months, but the collective view of the Executive about what needs to happen to make society better.

Today may well be the end of one process, but it is a new beginning in several respects. First, this has to be seen as a new beginning for the Executive. Wrangles about policing and justice have been a major source of discontent between the parties over the past few years, and, in particular, over recent months. Hopefully, the motion takes away those political difficulties, and we can have a new sense of partnership around the Executive table that focuses on the common good of the people of Northern Ireland, and on building a shared future for them.

This is also a new beginning for justice. This cannot be a case of the old Northern Ireland Office continuing under devolution, with simply the nameplate on the door changed.

The Department is not just a new Department; it is a new way of doing things that will create the situation in which justice will be able to respond better to the needs and interests of the people of Northern Ireland. We will be able to focus better on community planning, assuring that we will take account of local voices and try to co-ordinate agencies' actions. We will be able to focus on the speed of justice and on tackling avoidable delays in the system, ensuring that it is more responsive to the needs and interests of victims and witnesses. We will have more confidence in the integrity of sentences that are handed down, and we will be more effective at preventing offences and antisocial behaviour. Moreover, whenever people offend, we will be more effective at rehabilitating them so that they do not go on to reoffend.

We must ensure that the Justice Department plays its role in contributing to building a shared future, which remains the central challenge for all in the Assembly and for those who sit around the Executive table. I and my party wish the process well in the coming months.

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

Dr Farry: It will be an immense challenge for the person who takes on the job, but I have no doubt that we will see tremendous changes in the months and years to come.

Mr O'Dowd: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I support the motion. Many terminologies will be used about the significance of today's events for our collective histories. Clearly, however, those who will come after us will say that today was the day that we took a further step towards having politics rule supreme in this society and that it was the day that the people of Ireland took control of their destinies.

Those who planted the car bomb outside Hollywood barracks last night will no doubt claim that they are the voice of republicanism, they are the people who are leading the way towards a united Ireland and they are the people who will deliver that united Ireland. I say to them that they have learned nothing in the past 12 years of political progress. In fact, they have ignored

those 12 years. All parties in the Chamber can debate, fight and argue like the best of them, and, at times, I enjoy that. At the same time, all the parties have shown that politics can work and that it is working in this society. Not only is politics working, but it is delivering change in people's everyday lives. As an Irish republican, I passionately believe that politics will deliver constitutional change on the island and that we will move towards a reunified Irish state.

Today, by establishing the Justice Ministry, we have taken control of a very important aspect of political life. We have taken control of how our society protects its most vulnerable and deals with offenders and of how people, as individuals and communities, are at peace with themselves. I suspect that the people who planted the bomb last night could not care less about the progress that we make here today. I suspect that they are not tied to any political cause; rather, they are tied to violent acts. I have no doubt that they will have no strategy on how to reach a new Ireland, because their strategy is to drag us back to the past and into conflict. They have a strategy that will lead us there, but they have no strategy to lead us out again.

As politicians, we are not only supporting and voting for a new Justice Ministry, and, later, a Justice Minister, but we are voting to ensure that fortress politics is working. Politics is not simply about this Building, the Chamber or us politicians; it is about the citizens on the streets who are lucky enough to be in work, and it is about those who need society's care and attention. That, and not merely politicians, is what makes politics work.

In the weeks and months ahead, there will be a particular focus on the new Justice Minister's role, which, like all Ministers' roles, will be very difficult. The Hillsborough agreement contained a possible amendment to the draft Programme for Government that sets out a wide range of areas that require attention. Not all those areas will be resolved in this Assembly's lifetime. However, as politicians, we will have to make a start on ensuring that we have, as Dr Farry said, reform in the Public Prosecution Service and a Prison Service that not only detains prisoners but rehabilitates them, because that is what prison is about. Prison is not simply about punishment; it is about rehabilitation, and I fear that no such work takes place in many of our institutions. We must also ensure that we

have a justice system and a judicial system that reflect the community's mood and concerns.

12.45 pm

In the last part of my address, I turn to the SDLP's continued claims that it was somehow done out of the Justice Ministry — I note that Alex Attwood said that he had made his last speech on the subject. I again remind him that in this very Chamber on 1 December 2009, the SDLP voted for the appointment mechanism that will be used today. That was in clause 2 of the Department of Justice Bill, which had only three clauses, so I assume that SDLP Members read all of it. Therefore, the SDLP voted for the system that will be used today to appoint a Justice Minister. If 105,000 SDLP voters have today been robbed of equality, if gerrymandering is taking place, if the corruption of democracy is taking place —

Mr Attwood: Will the Member give way?

Mr O'Dowd: No, I will not.

Then, the SDLP voted for that.

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

Mr O'Dowd: If the SDLP believes any of those accusations, shame on its Members for voting for that.

Mrs D Kelly: I welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate in order to nail the lies propagated across the airwaves and elsewhere by John O'Dowd and other Sinn Féin members. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. I remind the Member to temper her language. She is coming very close to crossing the line; I ask her to not to do that.

Mrs D Kelly: I apologise Mr Speaker, but Mr O'Dowd has made claims and there have been misrepresentations on the airwaves by Sinn Féin Members in relation to the voting for the devolution of policing and justice. I make it very clear that in December 2009, my party put forward an earlier date — the end of December 2009 — for the devolution of policing and justice, which Sinn Féin voted against.

In December, the SDLP tabled amendments to protect and uphold the principles of the Good Friday Agreement and d'Hondt. What Sinn Féin will do later today will betray the 105,000 nationalist voters and others who voted for

equality protections for the institutions of this House. Therefore, let me be very clear: Sinn Féin is today colluding with the SDL — with the DUP. *[Laughter.]* I nearly got it right. *[Laughter.]* Collusion with the DUP — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mrs D Kelly: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Lest there be any mistake on anyone's part, I repeat that Sinn Féin is today colluding with the DUP in their betrayal of the Good Friday Agreement and of nationalist voters. Indeed, we will see later today that as far as the post of Justice Minister is concerned, no nationalist need apply. Therefore, Sinn Féin need not come out with the fairy tales that it is trying to put across today.

It is interesting that although the d'Hondt mechanism is not being employed to appoint a Justice Minister, it is being used as the correct and proper mechanism to appoint the Chairpersons and Deputy Chairpersons of the Committees. It is for the Members of the House who accept that discrepancy to explain to the electorate and others why there is such a difference and why d'Hondt is protected in one case but not another.

It is also interesting to hear the Alliance Party's words about a shared future, when we heard the deputy leader of that party say yesterday that chapters — not paragraphs or lines — were and are missing from the so-called agreed cohesion, sharing and integration policy. I, for one, look forward to seeing that policy finally published in full. On behalf of our divided communities, let us hope that in its haste to claim the Justice Ministry portfolio, the Alliance Party has not bought a pig in a poke.

Having said all that, however, the SDLP is a party that seeks to move politics forward. We believe passionately that politics is the only way in which society in the North will move forward. We will do our bit and step up to the mark to meet the challenges that lie ahead as the devolution of policing and justice powers unfolds.

The deputy First Minister (Mr M McGuinness): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I associate myself with the First Minister's remarks and offer my sympathy to all those who were affected by the bomb explosion last night. People should be under no illusions whatsoever about the real target of that explosion. The bomb may have been placed outside Palace

Barracks, but the real target was the peace process and the political institutions with which we have been charged with stewarding in recent years.

The work in which we are engaged today sends out a very clear message. We all know and understand the history of the North of Ireland. There was a failure of politics in the past, which led to conflict, injustice, inequality, violence and death on the streets. Armed groups were effectively in command, and they drove the agenda. Now it is different. As a result of the negotiations and the agreements that were reached at Hillsborough, the political process is in command and we dictate the pace. We are sending very clear messages to all those who are intent on destroying the peace process and the political institutions that their activities are totally futile. Their activities will not work, because we will not allow them to work.

The unity that has been demonstrated in the House over many months, and indeed the past number of years, and the agreements that have been reached have placed us in a much stronger position than we have ever been in. I will not recriminate about anything that any Member has said, be it a Member from the SDLP or the Ulster Unionist Party, about what is happening here today, except to say that the overwhelming majority of people in the North and throughout the island of Ireland wholeheartedly supports the agreements that have been made and the further step that we are taking today to push forward the peace process and levels of co-operation in a way that is unprecedented in the House. In other words, there is no going back. Those who try to drag us back to the bad old days will fail miserably because we have taken up our responsibility as political leaders to build a better future for all the people whom we represent.

I do not have any concerns about our process. As I said on 'Good Morning Ulster' today, the peace process is rock solid. The political institutions, whether they be the power-sharing institutions in the North, the all-Ireland institutions or the east-west institutions, are rock solid. What is happening at the moment is a waste of time and totally futile. It will not succeed, because the political landscape has changed for ever. All the major political forces in the North are clearly in favour of the success of the peace process and the ongoing working of the institutions.

Today marks the culmination of a process that has lasted for several years. At an earlier stage in the process, in November 2008, the First Minister and I charted a way forward that was marked by 37 steps. Almost all the steps in that process have now been accomplished. We have in place legislation, we have secured additional financial resources to adequately fund policing and justice functions in the challenging years to come and we have demonstrated community confidence. That enabled the First Minister and me, on 5 February, to announce agreement at Hillsborough Castle and a date for the devolution of policing and justice responsibilities: 12 April, which is today.

Others have contributed to the process also. The Assembly and Executive Review Committee has worked tirelessly on analysing the detail of devolving policing and justice responsibilities. In two years, the Committee produced three substantial reports on the devolution of policing and justice. It has heard evidence from a wide range of stakeholders, and I thank all those who served on that Committee for their efforts in laying the groundwork for today. In particular, I thank its Chairman, Jimmy Spratt; former Chairman, Jeffrey Donaldson; and Deputy Chairman, Raymond McCartney. The Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister and the Finance and Personnel Committee contributed substantially by scrutinising the necessary legislation over the past year. The Assembly as a body has also made a great contribution. There have been several extensive debates on the devolution of policing and justice, most recently on 9 March. Last year's debates on the Department of Justice Bill were arguably the most intensive discussions of any legislation that has come before the House — justifiably so, given the importance of that Bill.

Beyond the Assembly, the community has demonstrated its support for the devolution of policing and justice powers. Our people realise the benefits of local control and accountability in matters that can impact on their lives in the most sensitive ways. Today, finally, those responsibilities transfer to our devolved institutions. However, we must recognise that this is not the completion of the process. The arrangements that the First Minister and I agreed in November 2008 are not necessarily permanent. The ministerial arrangements will be subject to review, and the Assembly must come

to a decision on permanent arrangements by 2012.

The Assembly and Executive Review Committee has been separately mandated to conduct a review of the arrangements for judicial appointments. The timescale is challenging, and we must recognise the scale of the work that lies ahead. The determination, which the First Minister and I have jointly signed, and which we are asking the Assembly to approve, may seem a formality in some ways, yet it is of great symbolic importance. The determination sets the Department of Justice and the future Minister of Justice firmly within the structures of the devolved Administration.

The Minister will be a full and equal member of the Executive, and the Department will have the same status as others in this Administration. In the coming days, a Justice Committee will be established, integrating policing and justice within the scrutiny and legislative structures of the Assembly. This really is a huge step forward, and it demonstrates a decisive advance for the devolved institutions and their growing maturity. It challenges all of us to deliver on the community's expectations, and it gives us another chance to prove the value of devolution.

I urge the Assembly to approve the Ministerial Offices (Number and Functions) Determination 2010. Go raibh míle maith agat.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

That the Ministerial Offices (Number and Functions) Determination 2010 be approved.

Assembly Business

Minister of Justice

Mr Speaker: I will conduct the process for filling the office in accordance with the procedures set out in Part 1A of Schedule 4A to the Northern Ireland Act 1998, and in Standing Order 44A.

I will begin by asking for nominations. Any Member may rise to nominate another Member of the Assembly to hold the office of Minister of Justice. If Members from more than one party rise, I will call first the Member from the largest of those parties to make a nomination, which is the convention for other items of business in the House.

I advise Members that the Act requires that one nomination must be processed before a further nomination can be made. I will, therefore, take only one nomination at a time and put the Question on that nomination. If the Assembly resolves by parallel consent that the nominated Member shall be the Minister of Justice, and that person takes up office as required by the Act and Standing Orders, no further nominations may be made. I will call for further nominations only if those conditions are not fulfilled.

1.00 pm

I advise the House that there will be no debate at any point. However, I will provide three opportunities for short speeches during the proceedings. I will allow a Member who rises to make a nomination to speak for up to three minutes. When I have announced that the Minister of Justice has taken office, I will invite the new Minister to address the House for up to three minutes. After that, I will allow a round of short speeches by a representative of each party. Those Members will also have up to three minutes in which to speak.

The Northern Ireland Act 1998 requires that the person nominated shall not take office until he or she has affirmed the terms of the Pledge of Office. The Pledge of Office will now be read into the record of today's proceedings.

The Pledge of Office is as follows:

"To pledge:

(a) to discharge in good faith all the duties of office;

(b) commitment to non-violence and exclusively peaceful and democratic means;

(c) to serve all the people of Northern Ireland equally, and to act in accordance with the general obligations on government to promote equality and prevent discrimination;

(ca) to promote the interests of the whole community represented in the Northern Ireland Assembly towards the goal of a shared future;

(cb) to participate fully in the Executive Committee, the North-South Ministerial Council and the British-Irish Council;

(cc) to observe the joint nature of the offices of First Minister and deputy First Minister;

(cd) to uphold the rule of law based as it is on the fundamental principles of fairness, impartiality and democratic accountability, including support for policing and the courts as set out in paragraph 6 of the St Andrews Agreement;

(d) to participate with colleagues in the preparation of a programme for government;

(e) to operate within the framework of that programme when agreed within the Executive Committee and endorsed by the Assembly;

(f) to support, and to act in accordance with, all decisions of the Executive Committee and Assembly;

(g) to comply with the Ministerial Code of Conduct."

Paragraph 6 of the St Andrews Agreement says:

"We believe that the essential elements of support for law and order include endorsing fully the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the criminal justice system, actively encouraging everyone in the community to co-operate fully with the PSNI in tackling crime in all areas and actively supporting all the policing and criminal justice institutions, including the Policing Board."

The Pledge of Office has been read into the record. We shall now proceed.

Do I have a nomination of a Member to hold the office of Minister of Justice?

Sir Reg Empey: I propose Mr Danny Kennedy for the post of Minister of Justice. As Members know, my party had objections to this process, but a democratic decision has been taken. Furthermore, had the d'Hondt process been applied to this election, and given that the parties of the First Minister and deputy First Minister stated that they would not put names forward, it would fall to the Ulster Unionist Party as the next party on the list. Therefore, I am proposing Mr Kennedy, who has been a member

of the Northern Ireland Policing Board and who, by representing the constituency of Newry and Armagh along with other Members, knows more than many others, I suspect, about the issues that the community is facing.

I take this opportunity to respond to a point that the deputy First Minister made in his speech. Despite our concerns and worries about what has happened in recent times, particularly our concern that no pre-discussions have taken place among the parties as to how things should be handled here, and whatever failures we might have perceived in the handling of this issue, in light of the events of last night, let there be no doubt that whatever challenge is made, it is made to all of us, and the response has to come from all of us, irrespective of the views that we have expressed. I think that the people will expect nothing less than that, and they certainly deserve nothing less. That will be our approach to this matter.

Mr Speaker: Mr Kennedy has been nominated. Mr Kennedy, do you accept the nomination?

Mr Kennedy: I accept.

Mr Speaker: Before we proceed to the Question, I remind the House that the Northern Ireland Act 1998 requires that the resolution must be passed by parallel consent.

Question put, That Mr Danny Kennedy be the Minister of Justice.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 51; Noes 35.

AYES

UNIONIST:

Mr Armstrong, Mr Beggs, Mr Bell, Mr Bresland, Lord Browne, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr Cobain, Rev Dr Robert Coulter, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dodds, Mr Donaldson, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Sir Reg Empey, Mrs Foster, Mr Gardiner, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mr McCallister, Mr McCausland, Mr McClarty, Mr B McCrea, Mr I McCrea, Dr W McCrea, Mr McFarland, Miss McIlveen, Mr McNarry, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Newton, Mr Paisley Jnr, Mr Poots, Ms Purvis, Mr G Robinson, Mr K Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Savage, Mr Shannon, Mr Simpson, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr S Wilson.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Armstrong and Mr Cobain.

NOES

NATIONALIST:

Mr Adams, Ms Anderson, Mr Boylan, Mr Brady, Mr Butler, Mr W Clarke, Mr Doherty, Mr G Kelly, Mr Leonard, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McElduff, Mrs McGill, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McKay, Mr McLaughlin, Mr Molloy, Mr Murphy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Ms S Ramsey, Ms Ruane.

OTHER:

Dr Deeny, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Ms Lo, Mrs Long, Mr Lunn, Mr McCarthy, Mr Neeson, Mr B Wilson.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Boylan and Mr Butler.

Total votes 86 Total Ayes 51 [59.3 %]

Nationalist Votes 26 Nationalist Ayes 0 [0.0 %]

Unionist Votes 51 Unionist Ayes 51 [100 %]

Other Votes 9 Other Ayes 0 [0.0 %]

Question accordingly negatived.

Mr Speaker: Is there a further nomination of a Member to hold the office of Minister of Justice?

Ms Ritchie: I welcome the devolution of policing and justice powers last evening, which is a significant step forward. Today, a new Justice Minister will be in place, and that is also to be welcomed. We must not look over our shoulders at those who would take us backwards, including the despicable bombers in Holywood last evening. Today, the DUP and Sinn Féin could have nominated their pre-agreed candidate, and that would have been the end of it. That would have been carve-up politics masquerading as cross-community consent. Clearly, they want to stretch out the ritual to give the appearance of allowing the House to make a choice, and they want to do so with an embedded DUP veto against any nationalist.

No person is better placed to recognise an unjustified veto against anyone from a nationalist background assuming high office than my party's nominee, Alban Maginness. It was Alban who, several years ago, brushed aside the veto on anyone from a nationalist background becoming Mayor of Belfast. He served with great distinction in that office, working for all people in our divided community. Now, 13 years later, Northern Ireland's largest party finds it

unacceptable to have a nationalist hold the office of Justice Minister, despite the fact that the next Ministry is the democratic entitlement of a nationalist party and despite the fact that a majority in the Assembly has already indicated support for Alban Maginness, or so I thought.

Why is Alban unacceptable to the DUP? Could it be because of his legal training and long experience as a barrister? Could it be his outstanding public service as an elected representative? Could it be the fact that he has always stood against violence and thuggery from whatever quarter, more so indeed than many of those who might exclude him now? Alban Maginness is supremely qualified for this Ministry, and everyone knows it.

However, the public might ask where the DUP veto came from. The answer is that it came from Sinn Féin. Sinn Féin did not have to give it, but it decided to do so. The DUP veto against nationalists was made in Connolly House. Why did Sinn Féin do that? Again, the answer is simple. It could not claim the position itself, so it made sure that the SDLP could not claim it either. That is the same party that is bleating about nationalist unity so that it can win the sectarian headcount in places such as Fermanagh and South Tyrone. In public, it bleats about nationalist unity and, in private, it plots with the DUP against the SDLP, as one DUP senior negotiator laughingly told me.

I come now to my nomination. Alban Maginness should be the first Justice Minister of our new dispensation. I hereby nominate him for that position.

Mr Speaker: Mr Alban Maginness has been nominated. Mr Maginness, do you accept the nomination?

Mr A Maginness: I accept the nomination.

Mr Speaker: Before I proceed to the Question, I remind the House that the Northern Ireland Act 1998 requires that the resolution be passed by parallel consent.

Question put, That Mr Alban Maginness be the Minister of Justice.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 43; Noes 42.

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, 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 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:

Ms Purvis.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr P J Bradley and Mr Burns.

NOES

UNIONIST:

Mr Bell, Mr Bresland, Lord Browne, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr Craig, Mr Dodds, Mr Donaldson, Mr Easton, Mrs Foster, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Irwin, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Dr W McCrea, Miss McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Newton, Mr Paisley Jnr, Mr Poots, 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 Noes: Mr Bresland and Mr Spratt.

Total votes 85 Total Ayes 43 [50.6 %]

Nationalist Votes 42 Nationalist Ayes 42 [100 %]

Unionist Votes 34 Unionist Ayes 1 [2.9 %]

Other Votes 9 Other Ayes 0 [0.0 %]

Question accordingly negatived.

Mr Speaker: Do I have a further nomination of a Member to hold the office of the Minister of Justice?

I call Mrs Naomi Long.

Mrs Long: I nominate my party leader, David Ford, for the position of Justice Minister.
[Interruption.]

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mrs Long: I have worked with David Ford for some considerable time in the Alliance Party, most recently and most closely as his deputy leader. During that time, I have witnessed David as a person and a politician, and I know the calibre of the person whom I am nominating. He has shown a consistent and deep-seated commitment to serving everyone in our community without fear or favour and irrespective of religion, class, colour, nationality, gender, sexuality or disability. He is a man who has shown an innate sense of fairness in his dealings with other people privately and publicly. As an individual, he is committed to making politics work in Northern Ireland for our people, and he is committed to being a constructive force in whatever role is entrusted to him. For those reasons and many others, I believe that David Ford is the right person to take on responsibility for such a sensitive issue as policing and justice and that he can be trusted to act in the best interests of the whole community.

I recognise that the SDLP and the Ulster Unionist Party had preferred candidates in Alban Maginness and Danny Kennedy. My colleagues and I preferred David Ford. Having had the opportunity to express their preference, I ask those parties to give consideration to giving their active support to David Ford by voting for him at this point, as we would have done were the order of the nominations reversed.

I am pleased to be here to nominate David Ford for the post.

Mr Speaker: Mr Ford has been nominated. Mr Ford, do you accept the nomination?

Mr Ford: I accept the nomination.

Mr Speaker: Before we proceed to the Question, I remind the House that the Northern Ireland Act 1998 requires that the resolution must be passed by parallel consent.

Question put, That Mr David Ford be the Minister of Justice.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 69; Noes 33.

AYES

NATIONALIST:

Mr Adams, Ms Anderson, Mr Boylan, Mr Brady, Mr Butler, Mr W Clarke, Mr Doherty, Mr G Kelly,

Mr Leonard, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McElduff, Mrs McGill, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McKay, Mr McLaughlin, Mr Molloy, Mr Murphy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Ms S Ramsey, Ms Ruane.

UNIONIST:

Mr Bell, Mr Bresland, Lord Browne, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr Craig, Mr Dodds, Mr Donaldson, Mr Easton, Mrs Foster, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Irwin, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Dr W McCrea, Miss McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Newton, Mr Paisley Jnr, 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: Dr Farry and Mr McCarthy.

NOES

NATIONALIST:

Mr Attwood, Mr D Bradley, Mrs M Bradley, Mr P J Bradley, Mr Burns, Mr Dallat, Mr Durkan, Mr Gallagher, Mrs D Kelly, Mr A Maginness, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Mr McGlone, Mr O'Loan, Mr P Ramsey, Ms Ritchie.

UNIONIST:

Mr Armstrong, Mr Beggs, Mr Cobain, Rev Dr Robert Coulter, Mr Cree, Mr Elliott, Sir Reg Empey, Mr Gardiner, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mr McCallister, Mr McClarty, Mr B McCrea, Mr McFarland, Mr McNarry, Mr K Robinson, Mr Savage.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Armstrong and Mr Kennedy.

Total Votes 102 Total Ayes 69 [67.6 %]

Nationalist Votes 42 Nationalist Ayes 26 [61.9 %]

Unionist Votes 51 Unionist Ayes 34 [66.7 %]

Other Votes 9 Other Ayes 9 [100 %]

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved (by parallel consent):

That Mr David Ford be the Minister of Justice.

Mr Speaker: I ask Mr Ford to affirm the terms of the Pledge of Office, which have already been read into the record of proceedings.

Mr Ford: I affirm the terms of the Pledge of Office as set out in schedule 4 to the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

Mr David Ford appointed Minister of Justice.

Mr Speaker: I confirm that Mr Ford, having affirmed the terms of the Pledge of Office, has taken up office as Minister of Justice, in accordance with the Northern Ireland Act 1998. I offer my congratulations to the new Minister, and I invite him to make a short address to the House.

1.45 pm

The Minister of Justice (Mr Ford): Thank you, Mr Speaker, and I thank your staff for the efficient way in which the proceedings have been managed today.

Today is a significant day for Northern Ireland. It is a step forward in the peace process and in the political process, and it will ensure that the institutions that have been in place since 1998 are firmly fixed and that they will play their part in serving the needs of the people of Northern Ireland. Today is not the completion of a process; the completion of the process will come when the devolved Assembly and Executive carry out all their duties well, consistently and in partnership for all the people of Northern Ireland. Today is but a staging post to that effect, and that is — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. Allow the Minister to continue.

The Minister of Justice: It is important that the process delivers for the people of Northern Ireland and is not regarded as a one-day event. That is why my colleagues and I spent a significant amount of time in recent months before, during and after the talks at Hillsborough Castle seeking to agree policies that might help to form a Programme for Government for the Department of Justice and to ensure that progress is made on building a shared future for all our people. We believed that it was vital to agree those matters in advance to ensure that delivery is possible.

I want to thank publicly my party's deputy leader, Naomi Long, not only for nominating me today but for her role in those talks alongside our justice spokesperson, Stephen Farry. I thank the

other members of my team who have given their support to ensure that we now have the option of a Department of Justice that will truly deliver to meet the needs of all our people. I also thank those in the DUP and Sinn Féin with whom we negotiated. Some of the talks were not easy, but, as a result of having them, we have got better.

I am fully conscious that I am not the Assembly's unanimous choice. However, I say to every Member of the House, regardless of what Lobbies they walked through this afternoon, that we have a duty to provide leadership together. If we did not know that already, we, sadly, were reminded of it at 12.30 am today. We in the Assembly, through the Executive and the Committees, have a duty to show that we can provide partnership, leadership and delivery and ensure that all our people receive the benefits of devolution. I pledge myself to that end, and I trust that others will work with me.

Mr Speaker: There will now be an opportunity for Members from each of the other political parties to make remarks. I ask Members to limit their contributions to three minutes.

Mr McCausland: I congratulate David Ford on his appointment as Minister of Justice. I look forward to seeing him at the Executive meetings and to working with him in that capacity.

As a party, we believe that the devolution of justice powers is good for Northern Ireland. However, we also believe that that ministerial position carries additional sensitivity. It is not an ordinary ministerial position, and, therefore, it was important that whoever was appointed today had cross-community support. That support has been well demonstrated already.

Some people have argued that the appointment should have been made by the d'Hondt system. However, we are not wedded to that system. Others might argue that the appointment is a move away from the Belfast Agreement. Again, that will not cause us any difficulty. However, difficulties have arisen for certain other parties. I am thinking in particular of the way in which the Ulster Unionist Party argued very strongly that the appointment should be made through the d'Hondt system and that the post should, therefore, go to the SDLP. It was rather strange to hear the Ulster Unionist Party say that, given that its leader made a different argument in August 2009, when he said:

"Many unionists...would be very concerned that our first Justice Minister could therefore be someone who is not pro-Union."

Having argued that the post should be given to someone who was a nationalist, he then argued against giving it to someone who was a nationalist. Today, therefore, the Ulster Unionist Party ended up sitting down and not voting when it had the opportunity to vote for the nationalist whom it previously argued for. If that is unionist leadership, it is no wonder that that party is in the state that it is in today.

The position of the SDLP was put forward forcefully by a number of its folk, and particularly by its leader, who asked why anyone would not vote for Alban Maginness. I will give two reasons; one is a general political reason, and the other is a particular political reason. First, we could not vote for Alban Maginness because of the SDLP's continuing support for an issue that gets right to the heart of policing and justice: the 50:50 recruitment policy for policing, which discriminates against those in the Protestant and unionist community. It is the discriminatory approach of the SDLP that is the general political issue.

The more particular reason for not voting for Alban Maginness was the situation in my constituency, where, as a result of intimidation and ethnic cleansing in the Torrens estate, an entire Protestant community were put out of their homes. Alban Maginness described the vacant houses as a "windfall site" for nationalists. A windfall is something that is good for you, but it is not good if it means that people have been driven out of their homes. That sort of sectarian comment — that housing would become available for nationalists because unionists had been driven out — is the reason why we could not vote for Alban Maginness.

Mr Adams: Ba mhaith liom mo chomhghairdeas a chur in iúl don Aire nua agus guífm an t-ádh air.

Today was the day that, we were told, would never happen. There was once great opposition from the unionist parties to what is happening today. That is the age-old lesson of history: never to say never, or never, never, never. As for the SDLP, it threw the towel in on policing legislation almost 10 years ago in 2001, when it said that it would be impossible to get any other legislation.

Interestingly enough, the parties that whinged and gurned the loudest about what they called carve-up politics were the most eager to have ministerial positions. The Ulster Conservatives and Unionists - New Force — the Tories — failed to win cross-community support, and the SDLP just failed, again.

Despite all that, Sinn Féin stuck at the hard grind of making progress. We have delivered, with our colleagues, an increased policing and justice budget and a whole raft of new legislation. The reality is that the North never had acceptable or proper policing. Therefore, today is yet another important, proud day in the progress and necessary steps forward of an ongoing change process. Sinn Féin is very pleased — as, I am sure, are the vast majority of citizens — with today's progress. We are determined to keep moving, step by step, bit by bit.

For the first time since partition, there is a Justice Minister who is accountable to a local elected power-sharing Assembly that is representative of the citizens who live here. That is a good thing. Sinn Féin wishes the Minister well. He can be assured of our critical support in what will be a challenging ministerial post. Go raibh mile maith agat.

Sir Reg Empey: I understood that the opportunity was to be taken to make some comments about the Justice Minister, but Nelson McCausland chose to turn it into an attack on us. He is a person, incidentally, who has as many positions as there are days in the week. Never mind that; we will move on.

The fact is that a decision has been made. My party has had anxieties about the timing of this event. We regret deeply that there was no consultation, discussion or agreement in advance as to how we were going to confront the inevitable challenge that was going to come from renegade IRA elements. Sadly, they left their calling card with us today.

David is going to have to live with the fact that he is no longer the leader of the opposition. He and his party are now avid supporters of the Programme for Government, which is to be welcomed. — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Sir Reg Empey: Despite the fact that today's script was written some time ago, decisions have been taken. People are at risk, and, in the

spirit of the comments that David made earlier, we have to move on.

We have still not had any discussion or agreement on an addition to the Programme for Government. We are confronting huge challenges in the community. It is incumbent on us all, whatever our views might have been on the process, to decide that we have made our point. We feel those issues genuinely, and I hope that some of the points that we have raised can be dealt with and resolved. However, the one thing that we cannot do is continue an argument during the struggle and challenge that now confront us all, because the elements that were active in Holywood earlier today have not gone away. They will not listen unless they are faced with an absolutely solid wall of confrontation, with all the representatives of the people — whatever differences they have had in the past — showing their determination to face them down. We must ensure that people and our economy are not subjected to more years of destruction.

What happened this morning sent a very clear signal: we will be challenged. I appeal once more to all parties to allow proper discussions to take place to build a consensus on how that challenge will be met. That has not yet happened, and I regret that.

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

Sir Reg Empey: I say to David Ford that, despite our reservations about the matter, we will work with him. We hope that we will get a positive response.

Ms Ritchie: The SDLP welcomes the fact that a Justice Minister is now in place. We have already recorded our dismay at the denial of nationalist rights in the appointment. There is no escaping the fact that there has been gerrymandering as regards that office. Mr Adams referred to things that he thought had happened, but his record of the situation is incorrect. There is no doubt that the SDLP and others did considerable heavy lifting on policing over a period when some people sat outside and others engaged in violence. The SDLP has a substantial agenda on justice issues and will engage constructively with Mr Ford and the new Department on that agenda.

Mrs Long: I congratulate David Ford on his appointment as Minister of Justice. I wish him

well in the challenges that await him in that role, and I assure him of my support and that of his party colleagues as he strives to make a real difference in the role that has been given to him. I know that he will make a constructive contribution to move Northern Ireland forward, because that is something that he has consistently done.

There has been a lot of talk about how we arrived at this point. I want to talk about the road ahead, not the road behind. We have taken a step today. It is another important step that we are taking together away from the dark days of the past and towards a better future for everybody. We were reminded in the early hours of the morning that there are those out there who wish to threaten progress. They do so because they are threatened by progress. We have to demonstrate that politics can work and send a clear message to those people that violence will not deflect us from the course on which we are set and that such actions are futile.

I understand that, on a day such as this, there may be some rancour, but I trust that there is the maturity in this House and in these elected parties to put those issues behind us after today and to show that there is more in common to keep us working together than there is to divide us on the fundamental issues, and there is no issue more fundamental than justice. We must show that we want to put the interests of the entire community first.

2.00 pm

There are serious challenges ahead. Today is just a milestone, albeit a highly significant one, on a journey to a better future. It is not the destination. We will have to face challenges in the House and those that are placed on us from outside. We have moved further down that road today, and I believe that we will do so again tomorrow, the day after and the day after that. No attack or threat can deflect us from that journey, and nor should it. I wish David well in everything that he does.

Ms Purvis: I congratulate Mr Ford on his appointment as the new Minister of Justice. None of us underestimates the challenges with which the new Minister will have to grapple, not least the dissidents' attempt to derail all the political progress that we have made. They will not succeed. Policing and criminal justice issues are hugely important, and they impact

on all our lives. Devolution will mean greater transparency and accountability without affecting independence. I hope that devolution will also mean greater co-ordination and collaboration between Departments, not only in dealing with crime in a just and fair manner but in tackling the causes of crime, which include poverty and disadvantage.

I am happy to take on the role of leader of the opposition, and I look forward to working with the Minister and his departmental officials in delivering what is a crucial public service for all the people of Northern Ireland.

Dr Deeny: I, too, congratulate Mr Ford. I have known David for some years. He is a caring and intelligent man, and he undoubtedly has the ability to be a very good and thorough Justice Minister. His professional background will also hold him in good stead for the post. I wish David well in his role as our Justice Minister.

Committee Business

Statutory Committees

Mr Speaker: As this is a business motion, there will be no debate.

Resolved:

That, in accordance with Standing Orders 48(1)(a) and 49A, this Assembly establishes the following Statutory Committees:

the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development;

the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure;

the Committee for Education;

the Committee for Employment and Learning;

the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment;

the Committee for the Environment;

the Committee for Finance and Personnel;

the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety;

the Committee for Justice;

the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister;

the Committee for Regional Development;

the Committee for Social Development.

The composition and quorum of the Committees shall be as prescribed in Standing Orders 48 and 49. — [Ms Ní Chuilín.]

Assembly Business

Statutory Committees: Chairpersons and Deputy Chairpersons

Mr Speaker: I shall ask the nominating officer or acting nominating officer of each political party, in the order required by the formula contained in Standing Order 48, to select an available Statutory Committee and nominate a person who is a member of his or her party and a Member of the Assembly to be its Chairperson or Deputy Chairperson.

I call on the Rt Hon Peter Robinson, as nominating officer of the political party for which the formula laid down in Standing Orders gives the highest figure, to select an available Statutory Committee and nominate a person who is a member of his party and a Member of the Assembly to be its Chairperson or Deputy Chairperson.

Mr P Robinson: I select the position of Chairperson of the Committee for Justice and nominate Maurice Morrow to hold that position.

Mr Speaker: Is the Member who has been nominated willing to take up the office for which he has been nominated?

Lord Morrow: I accept the position of Chairperson of the Committee for Justice.

Lord Morrow appointed Chairperson of the Committee for Justice.

Mr Speaker: I now call on Mr John O'Dowd to select an available Statutory Committee and nominate a person who is a member of his party and a Member of the Assembly to be its Chairperson or Deputy Chairperson.

Mr O'Dowd: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Molaim Jennifer McCann mar Chathaoirleach an Choiste Airgeadais. I nominate Jennifer McCann as Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel.

Mr Speaker: Is the Member who has been nominated willing to take up the office for which she has been nominated?

Ms J McCann: Yes.

Ms J McCann appointed Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel.

Mr Speaker: I call on the Rt Hon Peter Robinson to select and nominate.

Mr P Robinson: I select the position of Chairman of the Committee for Education and nominate Mervyn Storey to hold that position.

Mr Speaker: Is the Member who has been nominated willing to take up the office for which he has been nominated?

Mr Storey: I accept the nomination.

Mr Storey appointed Chairperson of the Committee for Education.

Mr Speaker: I call on Sir Reg Empey to select an available Statutory Committee and nominate a person who is a member of his party and a Member of the Assembly to be its Chairperson or Deputy Chairperson.

Sir Reg Empey: I select the position of the Chairperson of the Committee for the Office of First Minister and deputy First Minister, and I nominate Mr Danny Kennedy for that position.

Mr Speaker: Is the Member who has been nominated willing to take up the office for which he has been nominated?

Mr Kennedy: I am.

Mr Kennedy appointed Chairperson of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister.

Mr Speaker: I call on Ms Margaret Ritchie to select an available Statutory Committee and nominate a person who is a member of her party and a Member of the Assembly to be its Chairperson or Deputy Chairperson.

Ms Ritchie: I nominate Alban Maginness as Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment.

Mr Speaker: Is the Member who has been nominated willing to take up the office for which he has been nominated?

Mr A Maginness: I am, Mr Speaker.

Mr A Maginness appointed Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment.

Mr Speaker: I call on Mr John O'Dowd to select an available Statutory Committee and nominate a person who is a member of his party and a Member of the Assembly to be its Chairperson or Deputy Chairperson.

Mr O'Dowd: Molaim Barry McElduff mar Chathaoirleach of the CAL Committee. I propose Barry McElduff as Chairperson of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure.

Mr Speaker: Is the Member who has been nominated willing to take up the office for which he has been nominated?

Mr McElduff: Tá mé sásta an post sin a ghlacadh. I am willing to accept the nomination.

Mr McElduff appointed Chairperson of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure.

Mr Speaker: Once again, I call on the Rt Hon Peter Robinson to select and nominate.

Mr P Robinson: I select the position of Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety and nominate Jim Wells to hold that position.

Mr Speaker: Is the Member who has been nominated willing to take up the office for which he has been nominated?

Mr Wells: I will be very pleased to accept.

Mr Wells appointed Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety.

Mr Speaker: I call again on Mr John O'Dowd to select and nominate.

Mr O'Dowd: A Cheann Comhairle, may we take a 15-minute break?

Sir Reg Empey: Am I to assume that, if we are having a 15-minute adjournment, to all intents and purposes it will be after Question Time before we can resume?

Mr Speaker: We will take the nomination before Question Time.

Mr O'Dowd: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Molaim Cathal Boylan mar Chathaoirleach of the Environment Committee. I propose Cathal Boylan as Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment.

Mr Speaker: Is the Member who has been nominated willing to take up the office for which he has been nominated?

Mr Boylan: I accept, Mr Speaker.

Mr Boylan appointed Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment.

Mr Speaker: Again I call on the Rt Hon Peter Robinson to select and nominate.

Mr P Robinson: I select the position of Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development and nominate Ian Paisley Jnr to hold that position.

Mr Speaker: Is the Member who has been nominated willing to take up the office for which he has been nominated?

Mr Paisley Jnr: I would like to take it on, hopefully for a temporary period.

Mr Paisley Jnr appointed Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development.

Mr Speaker: I once again call on Sir Reg Empey to select and nominate.

Sir Reg Empey: I would like to select the position of Chairperson of the Committee for Regional Development and propose that Fred Cobain occupy that post.

Mr Speaker: Is the Member who has been nominated willing to take up the office for which he has been nominated?

Mr Cobain: Yes, Mr Speaker.

Mr Cobain appointed Chairperson of the Committee for Regional Development.

Mr Speaker: I call again on Ms Margaret Ritchie to select and nominate.

Ms Ritchie: Mr Speaker, may I have a recess for 10 minutes, please?

Mr Speaker: Yes.

2.15 pm

Ms Ritchie: I nominate Mrs Dolores Kelly to be the Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning.

Mr Speaker: Is the Member who has been nominated willing to take up the office for which she has been nominated?

Mrs D Kelly: I accept, Mr Speaker.

Mrs D Kelly appointed Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning.

Mr Speaker: I call on the Rt Hon Peter Robinson to select and nominate.

Mr P Robinson: I select the position of Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development, and I nominate Simon Hamilton to hold that position.

Mr Speaker: Is the Member who has been nominated willing to take up the office for which he has been nominated?

Mr Hamilton: Mr Speaker, I accept the nomination.

Mr Hamilton appointed Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development.

Mr Speaker: I call on Mr John O'Dowd to select and nominate.

Mr O'Dowd: Molaim Raymond McCartney mar LeasChathaoirleach of the Justice Committee. I propose Mr Raymond McCartney to be the Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Justice.

Mr Speaker: Is the Member who has been nominated willing to take up the office for which he has been nominated?

Mr McCartney: Glacaim leis an phost. I accept.

Mr McCartney appointed Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Justice.

Mr Speaker: I call on Mr Kieran McCarthy to select an available Statutory Committee and to nominate a Member to be its Chairperson or Deputy Chairperson.

Mr McCarthy: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I am delighted to be in David Ford's chair, albeit temporarily. Nevertheless, it gives me great pleasure to nominate our deputy leader, Naomi Long, to the position of Chairperson of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister.

Mrs Long: Deputy Chairperson. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. Allow the Member to continue.

Mr McCarthy: There is no harm in trying. I nominate Naomi Long to the position of Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister.

Mr Speaker: Is the Member who has been nominated willing to take up the office for which she has been nominated?

Mrs Long: For as long as I am a Member of the Assembly, yes.

Mrs Long appointed Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister.

Mr Speaker: I call on the Rt Hon Peter Robinson to select and nominate.

Mr P Robinson: I select the position of Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel, and I nominate Peter Weir to hold that position.

Mr Speaker: Is the Member who has been nominated willing to take up the office for which he has been nominated?

Mr Weir: I am willing to accept.

Mr Weir appointed Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel.

Mr Speaker: I call on Sir Reg Empey to select and nominate.

Sir Reg Empey: I choose the position of Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development, and I nominate Mr Tom Elliott.

Mr Speaker: Is the Member who has been nominated willing to take up the office for which he has been nominated?

Mr Elliott: I accept.

Mr Elliott appointed Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development.

Mr Speaker: I call on Mr John O'Dowd to select and nominate.

Mr O'Dowd: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Molaim Michelle O'Neill mar LeasChathaoirleach an Choiste Sláinte. I nominate Mrs Michelle O'Neill as the Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety.

Mr Speaker: Is the Member who has been nominated willing to take up the office for which she has been nominated?

Mrs O'Neill: I accept.

Mrs O'Neill appointed Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety.

Mr Speaker: I call on Ms Margaret Ritchie to select and nominate.

Ms Ritchie: May I take a few minutes, please?

I have pleasure in nominating Mr Dominic Bradley as Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Regional Development.

Mr Speaker: Is the Member who has been nominated willing to take up the office for which he has been nominated?

Mr D Bradley: Glacaim leis an cheapachán. I accept the appointment.

Mr D Bradley appointed Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Regional Development.

Mr Speaker: Business is suspended for a few seconds while officials and I clarify a matter.

We can now proceed. I again call on the Rt Hon Peter Robinson to select and nominate.

Mr P Robinson: We will take a full 15 minutes, which would take the matter beyond Question Time.

Mr Speaker: I suspend the House until Question Time at 2.30 pm. After that, we will come back to this business.

The business stood suspended.

2.30 pm

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

Oral Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

FM/DFM: Washington Visit

1. **Mr Hilditch** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline any economic benefits which may arise from their recent visit to Washington. **(AQO 1003/10)**

5. **Mr McQuillan** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on their recent meeting with President Obama. **(AQO 1007/10)**

US Investment Conference 2010

7. **Ms S Ramsey** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline plans for the American investment conference scheduled for Autumn 2010. **(AQO 1009/10)**

The deputy First Minister (Mr M McGuinness):

With your permission, Mr Speaker, I will take questions 1, 5 and 7 together. On our recent visit to the United States, we undertook an extensive programme of engagements to promote inward investment opportunities, trade development and tourism that provided us with unparalleled access to some of the most senior decision-makers in corporate America. We met current and prospective investors as well as a range of senior business and political leaders. I cannot provide details of the companies visited, nor would it be wise to do so, given that discussions are at a very sensitive stage. By their very nature, negotiations on inward investment projects are confidential, and that is particularly important in the current financial climate when international competition is very stiff.

I can confirm that we met the senior staff of Allstate, which is one of our most important financial services investors. They also joined us at a gathering of almost 200 potential investors and key influencers in Chicago, where they provided a strong testimonial about their positive experience of investing here and why they have

continually reinvested here over the past 10 years. The First Minister also visited Hughes Tool Company in Texas.

We used those opportunities to cement relationships and to demonstrate our personal appreciation of the commitment of those companies and the commitment that they have made to the local economy. During our visit, we were particularly pleased by the announcement of the project by Q1 Labs, which is set to create 50 high-quality ICT jobs. That further demonstrates our ability to attract high-quality investment in the key sectors of ICT, financial services and business services. Invest NI's staff in the United States and its senior management team here will undertake follow-up work with the potential investors that we met. We are confident that further economic benefits will emerge from our engagement in the US.

The First Minister and I also had the pleasure of meeting President Obama at the White House. The president was joined at the meeting by Vice President Biden, Secretary of State Clinton and General Jim Jones, who is the director of the National Security Council. The meeting was very productive, and, in the course of the discussion, we briefed the president on political developments here, including the Assembly resolution to transfer policing and justice powers. We also discussed the US Administration's continued efforts to secure further US investment. The president was most encouraging and reaffirmed his personal commitment to helping us to secure a sound economic and peaceful future. Most significantly, we secured the president's and the secretary of state's support for an economic conference in Washington in October 2010. We also secured support to lobby for the continuation of the International Fund for Ireland (IFI). That demonstrates the ongoing commitment of the US Administration to helping us secure a sound economic and peaceful future.

Planning for the economic round table is at an early stage. Invest NI and our Washington bureau are working closely with the US special envoy, Declan Kelly, to maximise this unique opportunity. It is envisaged that the conference will bring together the leaders of some of the largest international companies that already operate here and potential investors and other partners. The event will be targeted at up to 30 senior executives, who will be invited to hear about our business opportunities. It will be a tremendous opportunity to showcase our

business opportunities to leading American investors, and we expect President Obama and Secretary Clinton to offer their personal support.

Mr Hilditch: I thank the deputy First Minister for his answer, and I welcome the developments that he has highlighted. Will he further update the House on the outcome of the meeting that he referred to in Houston between the First Minister, the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and senior management of Baker Hughes, which completed the programme of events in the US?

The deputy First Minister: That was an important meeting. We all understand that that company is in some difficulty at the moment, and the First Minister took the opportunity to visit Houston to speak at the highest level with the people who have responsibility for the company and, in particular, its operation here in the North. Most of those discussions are highly confidential, because there is always the hope that, no matter how difficult the scenario is for a company, something can be done to ensure continuing security for the workforce. That may not be possible in this case, but until such times as we have a definitive position on all of that, the less said about it the better.

Mr McQuillan: Does the Minister accept that the current economic climate has affected the US's ability to invest here?

The deputy First Minister: From our discussions with senior people in the US, be they from the political Administration or the business community, it is clear that despite a world recession that affects every country, with the possible exceptions of China and India, many businesses, in the context of the challenges that they face during the economic downturn, are consistently looking for new opportunities to improve their position. We believe, and others have advised us, that this is the opportune moment to put the business case for investment in the North. We have a tremendous amount to offer, such as a competitive environment and a highly educated, young workforce. We also have a near-shore location from which it is a short jump into Europe. Furthermore, the coming on stream of the Project Kelvin operation provides ongoing opportunities to build on the work in which we have already been engaged.

Although some people might be surprised that we think that now is a good time to go to the United States, all of the advice is that it is the

best time to go, because many companies are taking stock of their operations, and some of them are considering relocating to cost-competitive environments. We have one of the most cost-competitive environments in western Europe. The fact that there is so much interest in what we have had to say and in what we have to offer lends weight to our view that we have an ideal opportunity to try to take advantage of the world economic downturn in the interests of our people.

Ms S Ramsey: Go raith maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his comprehensive answer. Does he agree that the IFI should continue to be supported in delivering economic investment to those communities that are most in need?

The deputy First Minister: Everyone in the House will be aware of the hugely important contribution that the International Fund for Ireland has made, particularly to the border counties. Having spoken to representatives of the IFI and Secretary of State Clinton, the First Minister and I believe that the IFI still has an important but different role to play in contributing to community regeneration and tackling disadvantage.

The First Minister and I made a strong case to the US decision-makers for continued funding for the IFI, and we plan to meet representatives of the fund in coming weeks to develop that new approach. We took every opportunity, whether it was in the White House or on Capitol Hill, where we spoke to Congressman Richard Neal from the Democratic Party and Congressman Tim Murphy from the Republican Party, to make the case that the International Fund for Ireland should continue. We also made the point that the IFI should face up to the new challenge of ensuring that any contribution assists the Executive to target particular areas of social deprivation. As Members know, social deprivation affects the entire community. We left them with much food for thought, and we were encouraged by the response that we received.

Dr McDonnell: I congratulate the First Minister and deputy First Minister on the work that they did three weeks ago and on the gains that they made. As the deputy First Minister rightly mentioned, an economic conference was promised for May, but has been postponed until October. Is there a risk that it will be delayed further? Over the past 10 or 12 years, we have

had a number of such projects, but we have not always maximised the benefits. Therefore, will the deputy First Minister tell us more about how that project is progressing and detail the plans to maximise the opportunities?

Mr Deputy Speaker: I ask the Member to finish his question.

Dr McDonnell: Can we get our act together and as close to perfect as possible in order to maximise the benefits and milk the event for all that it can offer?

The deputy First Minister: It is fair to say that the First Minister and I share the concerns that the Member has expressed. We are all conscious that economic investment conferences have been held in the past. We understand that as we move forward in our discussions with Declan Kelly, it is important that we emphasise, as we did when he first became the US economic envoy, that we need economic investment. We can do without economic investment conferences that do not deliver. I believe that Declan Kelly appreciates and accepts that argument.

That said, there is no doubt whatsoever that both the First Minister and I have been impressed by Declan Kelly's performance, energy, contacts and commitment, and by the fact that he appears to be building a solid foundation through the work that he is charged to do. Of course, he does that work on behalf of the US Administration. He is a government employee, which means that he has the imprimatur of President Obama and Secretary of State Clinton. He is conscious of the need to ensure that many in society who have not benefited from the peace process will benefit from an effective strategy to attract inward investment. In recent times, several projects have shown success.

I am conscious that when the First Minister and I went to the United States in 2009, it was in the aftermath of the killings of two soldiers and Stephen Carroll. At that time, it was a worldwide news story that those killings had taken place after many years when there had been no such incidents. However, the big news story became the unity, not only between the First Minister and me, but of the entire House. Out of that, we achieved investment from Universal and HBO in the Titanic Quarter's Paint Hall. Those projects brought employment for hundreds of people. Of course, through our contacts in Wall Street, we have achieved another declaration of investment

from the New York Stock Exchange's Euronext company, which will bring between 400 and 500 jobs.

Therefore, all of those contacts are very important. The fact that when we visit the United States we are met by political and business leaders at the highest level shows clearly that there is still tremendous interest and every opportunity to build on what has been created so far.

US Investment

2. **Mr Gardiner** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what evidence is available that corporate America is ready to invest in Northern Ireland, given the experience of the Emerald Fund. **(AQO 1004/10)**

The deputy First Minister: It is clear from the overwhelming reception that we received in the United States that corporate America is ready and willing to invest here. As I explained, we are working intensively to develop foreign direct investment opportunities here. We are having considerable success, which, of course, has been facilitated by Invest NI and the work of Hillary Clinton's economic envoy, Declan Kelly, in recent months.

The House is already aware of commitments that have been made by the comptrollers of New York state and city to invest some of their vast pension funds and projects here. In March 2010, I was delighted to meet the state comptroller, Tom DiNapoli, in New York and to hear his assurance that he is still committed fully to investing pension funds here. I also met the newly installed city comptroller, John Liu, who has just completed two months in office. I was highly impressed by his knowledge of the potential for investment here and his determination to achieve mutually beneficial investment.

Indeed, we wish to extend our relationships to other state and city comptrollers throughout the United States. State pension funds are one of the most attractive forms of alternative financial reserves that are available to small regional economies such as ours. Given the restrictions on future Executive spending and the tightening of loans that are available from local lending banks, it is more important than ever that other sources of funding are made available.

Mr Gardiner: I thank the deputy First Minister for his lengthy and in-depth response to my

question. However, I am somewhat concerned that the American investment conference has been postponed until autumn 2010. The writing on the wall is not good. Will he assure me that what I am thinking is not right? I remind him of President Obama's views on inward investment and his election pledge to bring the jobs home, and that 12,000 jobs have been lost in the Irish Republic.

2.45 pm

The deputy First Minister: The Member should not be unduly concerned about the fact that the economic investment conference has been put off until October. Given the nature of the work, it is important to do things right. There was a consensus between the First Minister, me, Declan Kelly and the US Administration, and we are making better plans to do it right in the autumn and to do it in a much more focused way than was done previously. Many Members will remember the economic investment conference at Hillsborough, which was attended by well over 100 people. We are going for a focused operation this time, with 30 senior executives who are keenly interested in exploring the opportunities that we have.

The Member's concern is misplaced. The fact that President Obama and Secretary of State Clinton are supporting the economic investment conference shows that there will be high-level political input from the US. We can move forward with considerable confidence, knowing that further investment will flow from the conference.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the deputy First Minister's assurance of a focused approach to the upcoming conference. Does he believe that the New York State Comptroller and the New York City Comptroller are committed to using pension fund investments to achieve social justice and to redress patterns of disadvantage in the North?

The deputy First Minister: The Executive have enjoyed an excellent working relationship with the New York State Comptroller, Tom DiNapoli, and the Office of the New York City Comptroller. During my most recent visit to the US, I was pleased to meet Tom DiNapoli in New York and to have his assurance that he is fully committed to investing pension funds here also. I also met the newly installed New York City Comptroller, John Liu, who has just completed his first two months in office. I was impressed by his

knowledge of the potential for investments here and his determination to achieve mutually beneficial investments here. It was also clear that many of his aides and the people around him are conscious of what has been happening here and of the opportunities that that presents to them.

However, more work needs to be done by the pension management companies that are charged by the comptrollers' offices to identify projects that are suitable for investing here, and we will continue to work with both offices to make that happen. Indeed, we wish to extend our relationship to other state and city comptrollers across the United States. As we all know, state pension funds are one of the most attractive forms of alternative financial reserves that are available to small regional economies such as ours. We will continue to persevere. There were problems with the Emerald Fund at the beginning, but lessons have been learned. We hope that those initial teething problems will be overcome rapidly in our dealings with John Liu and Tom DiNapoli.

Mr Campbell: Does the deputy First Minister agree that, when he is in the United States trying to get business for Northern Ireland, it is not a very good idea to make references to a senior Roman Catholic prelate back here regarding him having to consider his position about what he was doing in the 1970s —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I remind the Member —

Mr Campbell: Yes — when the deputy First Minister was remaining silent —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order —

Mr Campbell: — about what he had done in the 1970s —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order, order.

Mr Campbell: — and did not remain open and above board about what he should have done in considering his position in the 1970s?

Mr Deputy Speaker: We move on.

OFMDFM: Departmental Priorities

3. **Mrs Long** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline their Department's three main priorities in 2010-11. **(AQO 1005/10)**

The deputy First Minister: We have a range of priorities in 2010-11. We are determined to deliver all our Department's commitments in the Programme for Government for 2008-2011, which will continue to be our key priorities.

OFMDFM has lead responsibility for three public service agreements in the Programme for Government and contributes to five others. Those include targets to tackle poverty, particularly child poverty, social exclusion and patterns of deprivation. For example, under PSA 7, we are working with other Departments to achieve measurable improvements for people with disabilities, to remove barriers to participation experienced by lone parents and to deliver a strong, independent voice for older people. Under PSA 11, we are about ensuring a strategic, regionally balanced approach to infrastructure investment and tackling regional infrastructure disparities.

In addition, we will continue our role in supporting the institutions of government by, in particular, bringing to completion the work that we have initiated following the Hillsborough Castle Agreement on the working of the Executive, outstanding issues from the St Andrews Agreement and parades. Today, the First Minister and I finalised draft legislation on parades, which will be published later this week for full public consultation. The associated process will be completed by early July, and we hope to be able to progress the final draft through the Assembly stages quickly, with the aim of it becoming law in December 2010.

A further important area of work will be the integration of new policing and justice responsibilities into the devolved Administration. That will include specific responsibilities for OFMDFM, notably the establishment of the statutory office of Attorney General.

Mrs Long: I thank the Minister for his response. Will he agree that continuation of the progress that has recently been made on the community relations strategy would be one way of underpinning the stability of these institutions? It would also make a contribution on all of the fronts that he mentioned. For example, it would contribute to tackling social exclusion, poverty and infra-structural disparities and would deliver on some of the promise from Hillsborough.

The deputy First Minister: The First Minister and I agreed the programme for cohesion, sharing and integration (CSI) on 23 February

2010. On 15 March, officials circulated the draft document to devolved Departments and the NIO for the input of policies, programmes and activities that will translate the principles of the programme into delivery on the ground. At the same time, the draft document was also forwarded to the following organisations and bodies for their information: the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, the Community Relations Council, the Equality Commission and the PSNI.

Once Departments have replied, the draft programme will again be referred to the Assembly Committee and will be issued to the Executive for final clearance. The programme will then be the subject of a full public consultation, which will provide an opportunity for all stakeholder groups to comment and contribute to its development. The public consultation is likely to begin in June, after the general election, and will continue until the end of September. It is tremendous that the paralysis that existed around the CSI strategy has effectively been removed and that an agreement has been reached that we must move forward with all speed in a decisive way to ensure that we deliver for the entire community.

Mr Kennedy: The deputy First Minister mentioned the issue of parading. Will he elaborate on the work of the Executive subcommittee on parading? Has he any optimism or expectation that that work will lead to the resolution of parading issues for the current marching season?

The deputy First Minister: From the beginning, we have made it clear that we are adopting a unique approach. The power is transferring from London to our Administration, and the First Minister and I, and every party in the Assembly, are conscious of the need to move forward in a way that brings resolution to what have been vexed, contentious and divisive issues in our society. The working group has done tremendous work, and the work of legislation is important. All Members will have access to the outcome of all of the deliberations, which will be put out to public consultation. I am confident that that will lend itself to building a far better mood both in the community and with all the stakeholders, be they the Loyal Orders or the residents associations.

We are trying to ensure that we move forward through a process of dialogue, with people engaging with one another and treating one

another with respect, so that an issue that can be divisive can be removed. We know that others in society are ill-disposed to the work of peace in which we are engaged and that they are continually looking for angles through which they can take advantage of certain situations to ferment more division in our community. We are determined to get this right, and I think that we are on the right course. The outcome will be inclusive and will be clear for everybody to see. When the draft Bill goes out for consultation, all interested parties will have an opportunity to contribute to this ongoing and important debate.

The Member asked whether the draft Bill will solve the problems that might arise during the upcoming marching season. The Bill will come into effect only if the House passes it in December 2010, and I passionately believe that that will come to pass. In the meantime, all of us must do everything in our power to build a better mood in society and to bring about a process whereby people are prepared to engage with one another. I am from a part of the North where such engagement has taken place over recent years and where solutions have been found as a result of that engagement.

Mr Shannon: In his initial response, the deputy First Minister referred to child poverty. Many Members from all parties across the Chamber believe that greater emphasis needs to be placed on helping those who are subjected to child poverty. Will the deputy First Minister indicate whether the Department intends to give that issue extra emphasis when considering its priorities for this year? Will he assure the House that there will be cross-departmental co-operation and interaction to ensure that child poverty is addressed at this time? It is important that such an assurance be given.

The deputy First Minister: It is vital that there be cross-departmental participation in addressing child poverty. I am sure that all of us are appalled at the levels of child poverty that exist. The reality is that we have a strategy that tries to impact on those high levels by lifting more children out of child poverty. The programmes and strategies in which we have been involved, the Executive subcommittees that we have established and the work of the junior Ministers in the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister show that we that are conscious of the need to bear down on what are unacceptable levels of child poverty. I agree

that a cross-departmental approach is critical; without it, we are going nowhere.

Policing and Justice: Capital Projects

4. **Mr O'Loan** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how the Executive intend to address the funding of major capital projects, particularly the proposed police college and new prison, following the devolution of policing and justice. (AQO 1006/10)

The deputy First Minister: In a letter to the First Minister and me dated 21 October 2009, Gordon Brown set out the details of a financial package to address the pressures on a devolved policing and justice budget. He gave a commitment that capital budgets in the next comprehensive spending review period would be sufficient to enable the Executive to complete the police training college and that they would enable routine but necessary capital work to be taken forward and the operational capacity of existing assets to be maintained. He said that the capital budgets would also enable the Executive to come to their own view on the relative priorities for the new capital expenditure, including Magilligan prison and other projects.

Mr O'Loan: I understand that a planning application for the police training college is about to be lodged. There is continuing uncertainty about whether the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety will contribute to funding for the college. Will the deputy First Minister tell us when a decision about the funding will be made? Will he also tell the House whether there is absolute clarity about the level of funding that is required for the college?

The deputy First Minister: The Budget (No. 2) Act 2010 provides the formal legal authority from the date of devolution for the Department of Justice, the Public Prosecution Service and the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to incur expenditure and use resources as set out in the 2010-11 Main Estimates. Decisions on the overall approach to all the Executive's capital expenditure post-2010-11, including the police college and the new prison, will be taken forward as part of the next Budget process following the spending review, which is expected to take place after the general election.

The Executive will, in the first instance, look to the Finance Minister to lead on that process.

It is our understanding that the business case for the integrated training college is now with the Department of Justice and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for their consideration. Those Departments must assess the value for money and affordability of the project. If they decide to approve the proposal, DFP will consider the case.

We continue to support fully the creation of a new police college.

3.00 pm

Environment

GAA Pitch: Bryansford

1. **Mrs McGill** asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the status of the planning application for a GAA pitch in Bryansford and whether Roads Service has supported the application. (AQO 1018/10)

The Minister of the Environment (Mr Poots): On 26 October 2009, the application was taken to council as an approval. Subsequently, I met Jim Wells MLA and officials from the Planning Service and Roads Service to give further consideration to road safety issues. Roads Service is content with the approval, subject to a number of conditions. The application remains under consideration.

Mrs McGill: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his response. I note and welcome the fact that the planning application was taken to council a number of months ago and that it was approved. Given that consultees responded and that a meeting took place with Jim Wells, the Minister and other consultees, will the Minister confirm or clarify when exactly the approval will be issued?

The Minister of the Environment: A meeting took place at which Mr Wells raised a number of significant issues with the planners. I received a report from that meeting, which I will consider over the next number of weeks. I hope be in a position to respond quite soon.

Mr Wells: I am the Mr Wells to which the question refers. I welcome the sudden interest shown by the Member for West Tyrone in the

affairs of South Down, which, at my last count, was around 120 miles away from the proposed Bryansford GAC complex on the Burrenbridge Road. Does the Minister accept that there is considerable concern in the community, not so much about the principle of a GAA club on the site but about its potential to expand and cause a considerable amount of disturbance to the local community? Does he also accept that it is essential, whichever approval is given, that the number of visitors to the site, which is on a small C class rural road, be restricted?

The Minister of the Environment: I read the papers on the background to the case. A report from the road traffic branch of the PSNI made it clear that the site is not the most suitable for large numbers of people to travel to and from, and therein lies the problem. We must ensure the safety not only of people travelling to events but of people in the vicinity when events are taking place.

Mr P J Bradley: I fully support the Bryansford club in its exciting betterment plans, and I fail to understand the created opposition, albeit minimal, to such a project. Does the Minister agree that the current arrangements, whereby the Planning Service and Roads Service act independently of each other in planning matters, are unsatisfactory and that the regulations should be amended to ensure that all issues relating to planning applications are delivered by the Planning Service alone, which is, after all, answerable for its decisions?

The Minister of the Environment: Planning Service delivers those decisions alone in that it is the final arbiter. All other organisations are statutory consultees, and anything that they present to the Planning Service is given significant weight in the planning process. However, planners make the final decisions. I am sure that the Member would wish to ensure that no one in, for example, Roads Service was stepped on for a positive decision in this case. Given the problems and false allegations with other sporting clubs, we would not want anything untoward to go on to ensure that this sporting club is able to develop in the way that it wishes to.

Mr Deputy Speaker: As the Member is not in his place to ask question 2, we will move on.

Planning Policy Statement 18

3. **Ms Anderson** asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the supplementary planning guidance for PPS 18. **(AQO 1020/10)**

The Minister of the Environment: I recently received a copy of the revised supplementary guidance from my officials in the Northern Ireland Environment Agency. I will consider the document carefully before making any decision on the way forward.

Ms Anderson: Go raibh maith agat. I thank the Minister for his response. Obviously, people will be interested to hear him comment once he has deliberated on the document that he received.

Can the Minister tell us whether landscape character areas have ever been used elsewhere in Ireland or in Britain in planning applications? Does he agree that they are unnecessary and restrictive, as some people argue? Does he agree that the supplementary planning guidance in its original form — we have not seen the revised form — would have seriously hampered the Executive's chances of meeting their renewable energy targets?

The Minister of the Environment: Yes; I agree. That is why the supplementary planning guidance was not released with PPS 18. It is my view that, had it been released, it would have inhibited the opportunity for Northern Ireland to reach the 40% target for renewable energy that the Executive set. If the guidance had been accepted, one arm of government would have been working against official government policy.

Mr I McCrea: I thank the Minister for his answer so far. Will he detail the reasons for any delay in PPS 4 and PPS 21 coming before the Executive? Does he have a timescale for when PPS 18 will be enacted?

The Minister of the Environment: Planning policy is a cross-cutting issue. The Department for Regional Development has an interest in planning through its regional development strategy. The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development has an interest in PPS 4 and PPS 18. A whole series of Departments has an interest in those particular issues. Therefore, we need to ensure that we have ministerial sign-off on all of them. I hope that we will be in a position to move forward in the not too distant future with at least one of those planning policy statements. It is in the public's wider interest

that that be the case. There are 2,500 cases outstanding on PPS 21 and several hundred outstanding as a result of PPS 4. Many of those cases would move forward to development were PPS 21 and PPS 4 released, thereby allowing our economy to move forward also.

Mr Gallagher: Can the Minister tell us whether single, small-scale wind turbines, such as those to serve farms or small businesses, are covered under the supplementary planning guidance? Furthermore, has he made representations to the Executive to restore grant aid for such developments?

The Minister of the Environment: They are covered under PPS 18. The PPS 18 document has cleared the way by refining planning policy for renewable energies, and it will be of significant assistance in ensuring that we meet our targets. In my view, the supplementary planning guidance was too detailed and too difficult, and it would have hampered our efforts. As I said, single, small-scale turbines will be dealt with under PPS 18. The supplementary planning guidance would probably not have created a significant difficulty for those turbines.

Dr Farry: Is the Minister prepared to reconsider current Planning Service guidance that does permit turbine development? That contrasts with development being permitted for such things as solar panels. Does he recognise that there should be some permitted development of turbines of an agreed height for houses and for businesses?

The Minister of the Environment: I am happy to look at that. Obviously, the visual impact of a wind turbine is much more significant than that of solar panels and of a number of the other schemes that can be used to develop renewable energy in homes. The impact on neighbours must be taken into account. I am happy to consider what the Member said, but I think that it will be slightly more difficult to deal with that particular issue than it will be to deal with that of solar panels.

Knock Golf Club

4. **Mr McClarty** asked the Minister of the Environment to outline the status of the planning application to develop the Knock Golf Club site. **(AQO 1021/10)**

The Minister of the Environment: The application to develop the Knock Golf Club site

is going through the normal statutory process, and an opinion to approve the application has been agreed by Belfast City Council. The Belfast planning office is discussing the details of a planning agreement between the golf club, the developers and my Department to ensure the delivery of the community benefits that are part of the package of measures presented by the developers. Once the legal process has been completed, the decision notice for the development can be issued.

Mr McClarty: I thank the Minister for his response. Given that the Ulster Hospital has no plans to develop the ground that it has leased to Knock Golf Club and that no priority has been indicated by the Housing Executive, will the Minister accept that there is no significant community benefit in permitting private developers to build on 24 acres of open space? Further, does the Minister agree that should the application be approved, all open space, including Ormeau Park, will be at risk if a planning application that included a social housing element was presented?

The Minister of the Environment: No; I do not agree. I did not realise that Knock Golf Club was in East Londonderry, yet it seems to be of great interest to Members from that constituency. Perhaps the Member should consult with Councillor Rodgers from his own party who is one of the strongest advocates for this planning application, and who perhaps knows a little more about East Belfast.

The information that the Department holds on its file is that the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust had an interest in the land in question, and no one from the trust has contacted the Planning Service to contradict that, despite what has been put into the public domain by its press office. The matter has been discussed with the Health Estates agency, which supports and develops land on behalf of the trust, and which is considering the long-term future of the site. All that will form part of the discussions on the details of the article 40 agreement.

If the Member did not know, there were also a number of other issues, aside from the hospital, in which there was particular community benefit. Perhaps the Member should look at the file or consult with Councillor Rodgers and the other representatives of the Ulster Unionist Party in

East Belfast, who will explain those benefits to him.

Mrs Long: Does the Minister have any concerns that the approval of this application could lead to a watering down of PPS 8, which protects open space, or an undermining of the draft Belfast metropolitan area plan strategy, which states that the green wedge should be maintained? Are there implications that are wider than this particular site and the local community benefits that the developer may have tried to establish?

The Minister of the Environment: I would have had significant concerns had the original planning application been approved. The original application, which was supported by Belfast City Council, of which Mrs Long is the Lord Mayor, would have seen a larger number and a greater density of housing units being built on the site. However, Planning Service refused that application and arrived at a decision through which the community benefits could be taken into account. The current application is much more considered than the one that the council that Mrs Long represents was pressing Planning Service to take.

Mr Dallat: Does the Minister agree with me that the residents in the area were entirely justified in objecting to the planning application, as were elected representatives, irrespective of where they come from? Will the Minister further agree that, on reflection, it was entirely wrong to use the term “morally corrupt,” and will he take the opportunity to withdraw that remark?

Mr Deputy Speaker: As the Member knows better than most, Members should keep to the subject of the question. The Minister should respond to the question put.

The Minister of the Environment: The one resident who objected during the normal planning process was absolutely correct to do so. After the recommendation had been taken to Belfast City Council, and after the council, which includes representatives from the SDLP, Sinn Féin, the Alliance Party, the Ulster Unionist Party and the Democratic Unionist Party, had rubber-stamped the decision as the statutory consultee on planning, we were able to move forward.

Why did objections come in after that? It was highly unusual that the objections did not arrive before a notice of approval was put to Belfast City Council. I do not believe that any of the

residents who objected are morally corrupt, and I never suggested that they were.

3.15 pm

Mr Deputy Speaker: Mr Savage is not in his place to ask question 5, and questions 6 and 7 have been withdrawn.

Planning Service: Conflict of Interest

8. **Mr Durkan** asked the Minister of the Environment to outline his plans for the introduction of a requirement for all staff within the Planning Service to sign an undertaking that any commercially sensitive information will be protected to avoid any potential conflict of interest. **(AQO 1025/10)**

The Minister of the Environment: I have no plans to introduce any new requirement for Planning Service staff to sign an undertaking to protect commercially sensitive information in order to avoid any potential conflict of interest.

All civil servants, including those in the Planning Service, are required to adhere to the conditions of the Northern Ireland Civil Service staff handbook, the Official Secrets Act and the Northern Ireland Civil Service code of ethics. The code of ethics specifically states that staff must not misuse their official positions, for example by using information acquired over the course of their official duties to further their private interests or those of others.

In addition, Planning Service staff are required to abide by the agency's code of conduct, which deals with private occupations, and to complete a declaration of interests on any outside interests that they may have. That is to ensure that they are not engaged in pieces of work that could leave them vulnerable to accusations of an actual or a perceived conflict of interest. Planning officers are also required by their professional body to abide by the Royal Town Planning Institute's professional code of practice.

Mr Durkan: I thank the Minister for his reply. If he believes that the existing requirements are sufficient to oblige staff in the Planning Service to honour the confidentiality of any information that they have, is he satisfied that sufficient means exist to police and enforce those requirements for people who leave the Planning Service and engage in other interests and activities? Is he satisfied that there is no

cause for concern about whether the current protections are adequately enforced?

The Minister of the Environment: I am very keen to ensure that the planning processes are speeded up considerably and that planning decisions are taken much more rapidly than was the case during the years of direct rule. We are beginning to see planning decisions being taken more quickly. That will have a significant bearing on people who move from working in public sector organisations, such as the Planning Service, to the private sector, as there will be less of a time lag in decisions being taken.

It is also appropriate that people who engage with companies in the private sector after leaving the Planning Service avoid cases that they were involved in as planning officers. That is not something that we can enforce once someone is no longer employed by the Civil Service.

Mr Bell: The Minister will understand the needs of the construction industry in Strangford. A lot depends on the Planning Service. Are we able to ensure that planning staff are involved and that decisions that can be made are expedited quickly so that the construction industry can be kept afloat, given that one in two construction jobs results from this House's work?

The Minister of the Environment: The Executive, which I represent and which have been appointed by Members, have the economy as their number one priority. Sometimes when I hear Members talking in the House, I question whether they have the economy as their number one priority. There seems to be a lack of concern on the part of some to ensure that people have the opportunity to get up in the morning, go to a job and bring a wage home at the end of the week.

I will always encourage the Planning Service, the Northern Ireland Environment Agency and every other sector in my Department that has a role to play to do things as efficiently as possible, to always bear in mind that they keep within the regulations and to act with the Executive's number one priority — the economy — in mind.

North/South Ministerial Council

9. **Mr McKay** asked the Minister of the Environment if he intends to continue to attend North/South Ministerial Council meetings in person.

(AQO 1026/10)

The Minister of the Environment: I am keen to use modern communication technologies that have significant environmental benefits. Where possible, the use of video conferences instead of travelling to meetings would reduce my carbon footprint and that of my Department. The use of video conferencing instead of travelling great distances to meetings could also prove to be a more effective use of my time and that of my officials and could generate savings to pass on to the taxpayer. I will explore the use of video conferencing for the next North/South Ministerial Council meeting in environment sectoral format.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Does the Minister plan to roll out that strategy and to attend other important, high-profile meetings with important groups by way of video conferences rather than in person? Has he considered putting a proposal to the Executive that all Ministers should offset carbon emissions for all flights that they take when carrying out their ministerial duties?

The Minister of the Environment: My predecessor, Arlene Foster, did that in the Department of the Environment, and work was done to offset the carbon emissions that resulted from the clocking up of air miles. The Member is bound to welcome my proposal given that his colleague Gerry Kelly engaged in a British-Irish Council meeting through such a mechanism. I believe that that meeting was very successful. I am sure that the Member did not wish to prevent Mr Kelly's participation in that British-Irish Council meeting, and I am sure that he does not wish to deny me the opportunity to use the same service as Mr Kelly.

Mr I McCrea: As the Minister knows, I raised the matter of the shortness of statements from North/South Ministerial Council meetings in a question after a ministerial statement on such a meeting. Has the Minister had discussions with any of his ministerial colleagues on such matters? In light of his comments about one of the junior Ministers just now, will he outline whether he has received any negative responses?

The Minister of the Environment: The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment previously engaged in such meetings, and it would be useful for us on the Environment side of the House to offer a lead. I hope that when we demonstrate a success story, I can encourage,

from a background of positive experience, other Ministers to pursue that idea.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question 10 has been grouped. Alex Maskey and Michelle O'Neill are not in their places to ask their questions.

Planning Service: Conflict of Interest

13. **Mr A Maginness** asked the Minister of the Environment what steps he has taken to introduce controls to ensure that the Planning Service is not vulnerable to potential conflicts of interest, collusion or impropriety. **(AQO 1030/10)**

The Minister of the Environment: Planning is a high-profile and often contentious area of work, and it is critical that the planning process be open and transparent. That is achieved in a number of ways, including the open-file process, whereby any member of the public can inspect a planning file; the corporate decision-making process, which ensures that all planning decisions are signed by three officers; and frequent reviews by the agency's audit team and the Department's internal audit branch.

In addition, a number of policies and procedures are in place to ensure that the Planning Service is not vulnerable to potential conflicts of interest, collusion or impropriety. Those include the Planning Service's code of conduct, which provides guidance on frauds, gifts, hospitality and private occupations. Moreover, all staff must complete a register of interests on a regular basis, and the agency has an anti-fraud policy and a fraud response plan in place.

To date, the agency has been covered by the Department's whistle-blowing policy, and the agency's established complaints procedure provides a mechanism for the public to raise concerns about the conduct and propriety of staff. However, in response to a recent Public Accounts Committee report, Planning Service has now prepared its own whistle-blowing policy that expands on the departmental document to include a role for external stakeholders to engage more easily with the agency on issues of potential concern. That policy will be available on the Planning Service website shortly.

Mr A Maginness: I thank the Minister for his reply. However, I asked him what steps he had taken to introduce controls. I wonder whether he is referring to controls that had previously been in place. If that is the position, what additional

controls does he intend to introduce in order to preserve the integrity of the Planning Service?

The Minister of the Environment: If there were a difficulty with the integrity of the Planning Service, it would be incumbent on me to take steps to ensure that that is dealt with. Prior to becoming Minister of the Environment, I had not been of the view that any issues of fraud or impropriety existed, nor were any such issues relating to the Planning Service brought to my attention in my 12 years as a public representative. I was often made aware of accusations, for example, along the lines of: "Those boys were taking brown envelopes." However, never once were any such allegations followed up with information that would have led to issues being taken up by the head of the Planning Service or the responsible Minister at that time.

The Planning Service has a stringent set of rules. I have spoken before in the House about the importance of having three people making decisions as opposed to one. The processes that have been put in place make it much more difficult for fraud, bribery or any other type of corruption to occur. If Members have information that suggests that there are improprieties, fraud or corruption in the Planning Service, I want to know about it. If that were the case, be assured that we would be very quick to deal with it.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question 14 has been withdrawn.

Planning Policy Statements 4 and 21

15. **Mr I McCrea** asked the Minister of the Environment when he intends to publish PPS 21 and PPS 4 and to outline the reasons for the delay. **(AQO 1032/10)**

The Minister of the Environment: I will publish PPS 21 and PPS 4 as soon as each is agreed. I submitted PPS 21 for Executive consideration in December 2009. My predecessor submitted PPS 4 in December 2008. The passage of time meant that I had to update PPS 4 and resubmit it in November 2009. In both cases, we have taken full account of issues raised by other Ministers, including amending the documents where it was right to do so.

Mr I McCrea: I thank the Minister for his answer. Does he feel that the length of time that it has taken to bring those policies to the Executive for approval is reasonable? Given

that PPS 21 deals with issues relating to rural dwellers, has the delay in the process been of any help to rural dwellers?

The Minister of the Environment: As I said, I submitted PPS 21 in December 2009. It is unhelpful that it is still in process, but I hope that it will be cleared quite soon. The delay is unhelpful, particularly to people who live in rural communities. Many people are waiting for planning decisions, such as young people who have the opportunity to build on their own farms and premises, but are being denied that opportunity because of the hold-up in moving from draft PPS 21 to the final PPS 21 that is being put to my Executive colleagues, which is a considerably better document. We must move forward on that as quickly as possible.

Mr McGlone: I have raised this issue with the Minister previously. Any of us who represent rural areas are deeply dedicated to an effective policy for single houses in the countryside. The Minister has outlined some of the difficulties around getting the new draft PPSs through the Executive. What measures have been put in place by the Planning Service to ensure that decisions will be made speedily and effectively as soon as the new policies are put into effect, so that those many hundreds of people who are waiting for a planning determination can commence the work that they require to be done?

The Minister of the Environment: That amounts to about 400 cases in each planning office; it is more than that in some instances. We could respond quickly and believe that we could clear the backlog of planning decisions within six months. The Planning Service is ready for the task once the draft strategies have been given the go-ahead by the Executive. Rural dwellers will benefit greatly from those strategies. I am keen that they move ahead as quickly as possible and am hopeful that that will be the case in the not too distant future.

3.30 pm

Question for Urgent Oral Answer

Quinn Insurance

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Speaker has received notice of a question for urgent oral answer, in accordance with Standing Order 20A, for the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment.

Mr Gallagher asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what steps, on behalf of the Executive, have been taken to facilitate the re-entry of Quinn Insurance into the UK market in order to protect the 650 company jobs based in Enniskillen.

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mrs Foster): As Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, I have been closely involved with the developing situation in Quinn Insurance Limited. I confirm that all possible steps are being taken to assist the company and the joint provisional administrators to find a resolution to the difficult issues facing the company. I have personally made contact with ministerial colleagues in the Republic of Ireland as well as the appointed joint administrators, Quinn management and employee groups. The First Minister and the deputy First Minister have written to the Taoiseach to register the Executive's concern and willingness to work together to help to secure jobs in Northern Ireland and in the border counties.

I have been informed that the Irish Regulator has the discretion to grant permission to operate in the UK. I have written to the UK Financial Services Authority (FSA) outlining the importance of the Quinn group to the Northern Ireland economy and seeking support for the Irish Regulator to allow the company to start to write business in the UK and prevent the ongoing decline and potential job losses.

Mr Gallagher: I thank the Minister for her answer and her work on behalf of the Executive. She, like other Members, represents probably the most economically disadvantaged constituency, and the loss of 650 jobs would completely devastate the area. The Minister

accepts that addressing the situation is a priority. Subject to procedures elsewhere that she referred to, it is a priority that the UK market be re-opened to Quinn Insurance and that it continue to operate in Enniskillen.

Will the Minister further accept that, should there be any change due to the procedures that I mentioned, the Executive will do everything possible to work with any future management and persuade whoever needs to be persuaded to have those jobs remain at the Enniskillen site?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and

Investment: Yes, I can easily assure the Member about that, because that is what we have been doing and what we will continue to do. Invest NI officials met the Quinn Insurance management team in Cavan on Friday 9 April 2010, and the Member and I were at another meeting about Quinn Insurance on Friday. It was confirmed that there is no immediate threat of job losses; however, if a negative definitive decision was taken on the UK market, that situation would be revisited.

There are two main issues to be resolved: first is the solvency issue in relation to the Regulator in the Republic of Ireland; second is the issue that we are all pressing on: the opening up of the UK market for Quinn Insurance so that it can write new business in the UK.

Members will be interested to hear that the court case that was scheduled to happen today has been adjourned for one week. The company has welcomed the fact that a permanent administrator has not been appointed. The case being adjourned for another week is good news for the Quinn group as it gives it some time. That deals with the solvency issue, but we need to press ahead in relation to UK business, and I know that all colleagues locally and in the House will want to press for that.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mr A Maginness): I thank the Minister for her reply.

In a text that I read in relation to the court hearing, the senior counsel for the regulator stated that officials received a lengthy affidavit from the company this morning. He said:

“While it does not appear to go in substance into several of the very serious concerns of the regulator in this matter, it nevertheless merits careful consideration by the regulator and a response”.

That is not a hopeful comment.

What worries me is that if further pressure is put on Quinn Insurance, there will be a consequential impact on other companies in the Quinn Group. That could cause further employment difficulties down the line for the people who are employed by those other companies. Could the Minister meet the Taoiseach or Mr Lenihan to see whether anything can be done on a cross-border basis to ensure the retention of those jobs?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and

Investment: I have not had a chance to read the text in relation to the affidavit, but I spoke to Quinn management this afternoon. They, like me, clearly believe that there are two issues: the solvency issue, which they referred to, and the regulatory issue. Sean Quinn has said that he is an entrepreneur and admitted that he is not a man for regulation. He has admitted that mistakes have been made, and he wants to put them right. There is no point in shying away from that.

Whether the UK market should be opened again is a decision for the regulator alone. We have tried to assist by pointing out the profitable areas of business that can be opened again. Surely it is the profitable areas of any business in administration that one would wish to have in operation again as quickly as possible. The point needs to be made that we wholly respect the remit and independence of the regulator in the Irish Republic and with respect to the FSA. However, we want to ensure that all the available information is given to the regulator so that they can make the proper decision for the company in the longer term.

The Member's point about the wider Quinn Group is well taken and well made. The wider Quinn Group employs more than 2,000 people in County Fermanagh, and it is the strategic group to County Fermanagh. I am well aware that any job losses in that group would have a huge and disproportionate impact on County Fermanagh.

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

Assembly Business

Statutory Committees: Chairpersons and Deputy Chairpersons

Business resumed.

Mr Speaker: Before we proceed, I advise the House that we must go back to nomination 15 as, at that stage, it was still possible for the party concerned to select a Committee in which it did not have a party interest. I ask the nominating officer, the Rt Hon Peter Robinson, to reselect.

Mr P Robinson: Mr Speaker, we accept your ruling that we cannot have the chairmanship that we have held for the last 35 months. I nominate Michelle McIlveen for the position of Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Regional Development.

Mr Speaker: Is the Member who has been nominated willing to take up the office for which she has been nominated?

Miss McIlveen: I accept the nomination.

Sir Reg Empey: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. For clarification, are you saying that all the positions after nomination 15 are now invalid?

Mr Speaker: Yes; we are starting back at nomination 15 and will go right through the other nominations again.

Ms McIlveen appointed Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Regional Development.

Mr Speaker: This is nomination 16. I call on Sir Reg Empey to select and nominate.

Sir Reg Empey: I select the position of Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel and nominate Mr David McNarry for it.

Mr Speaker: Is the Member who has been nominated willing to take up the office for which he has been nominated?

Mr McNarry: I am willing to accept, Mr Speaker.

Mr McNarry appointed Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel.

Mr Speaker: I call on Mr John O'Dowd to select and nominate.

Mr O'Dowd: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle.

Molaim Michelle O'Neill mar LeasChathaoirleach an Choiste Sláinte.

I nominate Michelle O'Neill as the Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety.

Mr Speaker: Is the Member who has been nominated willing to take up the office for which she has been nominated?

Mrs O'Neill: I am.

Mrs O'Neill appointed Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety.

Mr Speaker: I call on Ms Margaret Ritchie to select and nominate.

Ms Ritchie: I nominate Dominic Bradley as Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment.

Mr Speaker: Is the Member who has been nominated willing to take up the office for which he has been nominated?

Mr D Bradley: Glacaim leis an ainmniúchán.

I accept the nomination.

Mr D Bradley appointed Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment.

Mr Speaker: Once again, I call the Rt Hon Peter Robinson to select and nominate.

Mr P Robinson: I select the position of Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning and nominate Peter Weir to hold that position.

Mr Speaker: Is the Member who has been nominated willing to take up the office for which he has been nominated?

Mr Weir: For the second time today, I am willing to accept the nomination.

Mr Weir appointed Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning.

Mr Speaker: Again, I call Mr John O'Dowd to select and nominate.

Mr O'Dowd: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle.

Molaim Carál Ní Chuilín mar LeasChathaoirleach an Social Development Committee.

I nominate Carál Ní Chuilín as Deputy Chairperson of the Social Development Committee.

Mr Speaker: Is the Member who has been nominated willing to take up the office for which she has been nominated?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am.

Ms Ní Chuilín appointed Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development.

Mr Speaker: Again, I call the Rt Hon Peter Robinson to select and nominate.

Mr P Robinson: I select the position of Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Education and nominate David Hilditch to hold that position.

Mr Speaker: Is the Member who has been nominated willing to take up the office for which he has been nominated?

Mr Hilditch: I accept nomination as Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Education.

Mr Hilditch appointed Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Education.

Mr Speaker: I call Sir Reg Empey to select and nominate.

Sir Reg Empey: I select the position of Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development, and I nominate Mr Tom Elliott for that position.

Mr Speaker: Is the Member who has been nominated willing to take up the office for which he has been nominated?

Mr Elliott: For the second time, yes.

Mr Elliott appointed Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development.

Mr Speaker: I call on Ms Ritchie to select and nominate.

Ms Ritchie: May I take time out for a few minutes, please?

Mr Speaker: Yes.

Ms Ritchie: I nominate Declan O'Loan as Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure.

Mr Speaker: Is the Member who has been nominated willing to take up the office for which he has been nominated?

Mr O'Loan: I am happy to accept the nomination.

Mr O'Loan appointed Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure.

3.45 pm

Mr Speaker: Again, I call on Mr John O'Dowd to select and nominate.

Mr O'Dowd: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Molaim Paul Butler mar LeasChathaoirleach an ETI Committee.

I nominate Paul Butler for the post of Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment.

Mr Speaker: Is the Member who has been nominated willing to take up the office for which he has been nominated?

Mr Butler: Tá mé sásta glacadh leis an phost. I am willing to accept.

Mr Butler appointed Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment.

Mr Speaker: That concludes the appointment of Chairpersons and Deputy Chairpersons of Statutory Committees. I am required by Standing Orders to ensure that all Members who do not hold ministerial or junior ministerial office be offered at least one Statutory Committee place. The Business Committee will consider the allocation of Committee seats when it meets tomorrow, and Committee membership will be published as soon as possible. The business of seeking the Assembly's approval of the membership of the Statutory Committees is listed in tomorrow's Order Paper.

Adjourned at 3.46 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 13 April 2010

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Assembly Business

Mr Campbell: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Yesterday, during Oral Answers to Questions to the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, the deputy First Minister, in reply to question 2, used a series of phrases such as that he and the First Minister were “received in the United States”, that,

“I was delighted to meet the state comptroller”,

and that,

“I also met the newly installed city comptroller”,

and wished to meet others “throughout the United States”. — *[Official Report, Vol 50, No 3, p158, col 1].*

He repeatedly referred to his and the First Minister's recent visit to the US. During that visit, the deputy First Minister was quoted widely in Northern Ireland concerning whether Cardinal Brady should consider his position over an alleged lack of transparency surrounding his role in the Brendan Smyth child abuse scandal. During the deputy First Minister's trip to America, which he talked about in his answer, his comments caused widespread anger in Northern Ireland given his reluctance to talk about the activities in which he was engaged at the same time. In my supplementary question, I asked:

“Does the deputy First Minister agree that, when he is in the United States trying to get business for Northern Ireland, it is not a very good idea to make references to a senior Roman Catholic prelate back here regarding him having to consider his position about what he was doing back in the 1970s... when the deputy First Minister was remaining silent...about what he had done in the 1970s.” — [Official Report, Vol 50, No 3, p159, col 1].

The Hansard report also records the Deputy Speaker, Sinn Féin's Francie Molloy, as endeavouring to prevent me from asking that question with the words “We move on”.

Mr Speaker, will you examine the Hansard report? We in this party are determined that, inside the Assembly, people should not be allowed to forget their past and, outside it, they should not be allowed to drag us back to the past.

Mr Speaker: As the Member has raised the matter this morning on a point of order, I shall look at yesterday's Hansard report, and I shall come back to the House or to the Member directly.

Ministerial Statement

Workforce Skills

Mr Speaker: I have received notice from the Minister for Employment and Learning that he wishes to make a statement.

The Minister for Employment and Learning (Sir Reg Empey): With your permission, I wish to make a statement on the joint work being undertaken by my officials and those in Invest Northern Ireland to take forward one of the recommendations from the independent review of economic policy (IREP).

As Members will be aware, the Executive have placed the economy at the centre of the Programme for Government. In doing so, the Executive recognise that, if the people of Northern Ireland are to enjoy a higher standard of living, it is necessary for our economy to prosper. Only through the creation of high-value, highly paid jobs can we achieve our targets on productivity and wealth generation. It is misleading for government to claim that it will directly create employment: companies create employment. It has been said to me that sometimes the best thing that government can do is to get out of the way.

Nevertheless, government can provide effective support to people who are willing and able to grow their business, creating employment as they go. The skills agenda, for which I am responsible, is consistently referred to as the central plank of economic growth. In order to achieve the outcomes that they desire, our employers need skilled employees, our people need the right skills and qualifications to get the jobs and earn the salaries that they desire, and the Assembly wants the Northern Ireland education and training system to deliver the types, numbers and quality of skills that it desires. One need not go far to see the hard benefits of higher skills. Recent research by my Department concludes that better qualifications are significantly and strongly associated with higher probabilities of labour market success in every region of the UK, as measured through employment and employment status.

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment made a statement to the Chamber on the independent review of economic policy and its implication for the economic development agenda. The development of a coherent and

co-ordinated economic strategy that includes a strong focus on skills is vital if we are to deliver on our Programme for Government.

The IREP report refers to the “responsive education system” in the state of North Carolina. My Department has a long-standing relationship with officials in North Carolina and particularly with the joint workforce development programme run by the community college sector and the Department of Commerce there. The model of new and expanding industry investment in North Carolina is framed around a simple premise: if an employer creates 12 or more new jobs, the model will support the costs of training the new workforce. That simple premise has served the state well for many years, during which it has been added to and refined.

As recently as 2006, the new and expanding industry training scheme delivered projects on behalf of 197 companies, including 92 new investors in North Carolina. The details of each project are different and can be subject to intense negotiation with each client company, but the basic offer is easily understood and relatively simple to deliver. The integration of the workforce training system with the inward investment body is key to the success of such a model. By having people from the skills delivery side present at the first meeting with the company that is creating the jobs — regardless of whether that company is already located in the state — the model allows a high degree of assurance to be given on the practicalities of delivering on the promise of skills support.

My Department has great pride in the ability of our further and higher education sectors to rise to such a challenge. In turn, I recognise the need for my officials to play their role in such a process. Work has begun on a pilot to test some of the characteristics of the North Carolina model in a Northern Ireland context for existing firms wishing to expand and for potential new inward investors. Officials from my Department are working closely with colleagues in Invest NI to devise and deliver bespoke projects for a number of Invest NI client companies. Those projects are known collectively as the assured skills pilot. That title encapsulates the essence of how my Department can contribute to the inward investment process.

When a company is interested in creating jobs here, we want to be able to assure it that we

can provide the necessary support to deliver the skilled workforce that it requires. That could mean that we deliver bespoke training programmes, as we have done successfully in a wide range of upskilling projects this year, including programmes on business improvement techniques. It could also mean the creation of a graduate conversion course like the successful software professional course. Furthermore, it could mean that we work with our colleges and universities to adapt the mainstream curriculum to deliver a large-scale solution whereby every person who is qualified in a particular discipline would also have a specific skills set that is directly relevant to the employer in question. Whatever it means, we want to be able to demonstrate through action, as opposed to mere words, that we are open for business and are ready and able to help.

One of the individual projects that is being delivered through the pilot focuses on providing assistance to Citi, the multinational financial services company. My officials have, for a number of years, supported work by Belfast Metropolitan College to deliver industry-relevant professional qualifications that were not previously available in Northern Ireland to almost 200 staff in Citi. We are now working with the University of Ulster to take that to the next level and broker the provision of technical training on global securities operations to enhance further the skills profile of the company's staff.

Members will understand that I am unable to go into the details today of the other projects that are under consideration, given the significant sensitivities that are involved in the inward investment process. However, I hope that my description earlier of some of the pilots gives a flavour of the type of project that will be covered by the assured skills pilot. I am confident that I will have Members' support in taking that forward.

I assure Members that nothing in the project undermines my strong commitment to helping companies to upskill their existing workforce, regardless of expansion opportunities. After all, 70% of the 2020 workforce are already in work and will require further training. Helping those people to raise their skills levels is a crucial part of our future economic success. Even though I am able to assert confidently our ability to deliver on that vital agenda, I am well aware of the challenges that we face. For example,

the independent review of economic policy has set out the clear need to judge the performance of Invest NI on a portfolio basis. It will be necessary to include my Department's efforts in support of Invest NI in that same model of analysis.

We must also operate under the rules on state aid that were set down by the European Commission. I know that that is an issue for my Department and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment. That said, we know already that we can deliver the basic components of the assured skills system. We have done so time and again over the years. The task now is to join up the various elements and make a genuinely game-changing contribution to deliver new jobs and growth to Northern Ireland.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning (Mrs D Kelly): I

thank the Minister for his statement. It is an exciting pilot and one to which we all look forward. I certainly wish those involved in the pilot projects well.

Are there sufficient resources in the Minister's Department to see the projects through to completion? Are there plans to mainstream that work? Given the opportunities that exist on an all-island basis, some people will wonder why the Minister went to North Carolina. There are opportunities across the island for people to avail themselves of funding under INTERREG IVa. What applications has the Department submitted under INTERREG IVa on an all-island basis for the integration of the colleges? What applications has the Department submitted under that funding stream to take advantage of the opportunities that exist on an east-west basis with the coast of Scotland?

10.45 am

The Minister for Employment and Learning: I congratulate the Member on her appointment as Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning. I will also take this opportunity to thank the outgoing Chairperson, Sue Ramsey, for her diligence over the past three years.

I welcome the fact that Mrs Kelly wishes the pilot well. She asked whether there are sufficient resources: I believe that there are. We have set aside about £2 million from the skills and industry budget for anticipated work in the current financial year. However, since we are

at the pilot stage, it is very hard to anticipate, because it is a demand-led scheme; therefore, we can only guess at what response we might get. Ultimately, the plan will be to mainstream the pilot, but the purpose of a pilot is to prepare and test a model and perhaps adapt it. We will work closely with Invest NI on the matter, but there is no doubt that the objective is to mainstream it.

The Member will be aware that, the year before last, the then Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment in the Republic, Mary Coughlan, and I hosted the first all-Ireland, all-island skills conference in Londonderry and in County Donegal. As the Member will know, a great deal of work is going on between the University of Ulster and the Letterkenny Institute, and that is progressing extremely well. I will have to inquire about the INTERREG issue that the Member raised, and I will write to her on that; however, I am confident that we will be able to perfect the scheme and mainstream it. That is the objective.

The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning (Mr Weir): I thank the Minister for his statement. In looking at the best possible schemes for Northern Ireland, it is good to see that we are not artificially limiting ourselves geographically but are looking at the best experiences across the world. What are the timescales for the pilots and what means of evaluation does the Minister intend to put in place to test them out? Obviously, we need to ensure that what is put in place operates on the best possible basis.

The Minister for Employment and Learning: I thank the Member for that question. It is correct that we looked at the model because of connections that we had built up over the years. Indeed, I have visited North Carolina on a number of occasions, and the Committee went there last year. We believe that that model is one of the most effective, because North Carolina achieved very high growth rates throughout the 2000s. Therefore, we must cast everywhere around the world; we should not be restricted to any particular geographical location. If people with similar economies have found a way of doing things that works and which can be applied to us, that is fine. Of course, we provided suggestions to them on things that we do that they do not. That is the point of exchanging ideas around the world, and I see no reason why we should not do that.

The timescales for the pilots are that we have provided a budget for the current financial year. We are working jointly with Invest NI on the issue; therefore, we will assess the outcomes jointly. I assure the Member that we wish to share our findings with the Committee, because the Committee has been aware of the model for some time and is generally supportive of it; therefore, the answer to the Member's question is that we will run it throughout this year. If it works, we will have to make an assessment, because we will have to make up our mind when the budgets for subsequent years are being addressed in the new comprehensive spending review. At that stage, we will have to make decisions on whether we will provide for it or not. Therefore, we have no difficulty in sharing our experience with the Committee. There are no secrets; it is open. It is a question of what works and what delivers.

Through the model, we are trying to take the thrust of the Barnett report and, working with Invest NI, put it into practice. The essence of the model lies in the fact that it is cross-cutting, rather than operating in separate silos. I am sure that the Member supports that general principle. I think that I can give him the assurances that he seeks, particularly on evaluation.

Mr Butler: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his statement on the initiative. I know that a number of Committee members had looked to the North Carolina model, but there are initiatives closer to home.

The Minister is well aware that some people fall into the NEET category — not in education, employment or training. He knows also that I have asked him about the Future Jobs Fund, which, it seems, applies in Britain but not here. Why is the Minister not trying to tackle that category of young people who are aged between 16 and 24? There are more than 50,000 of them in the North of Ireland. An initiative such as the Future Jobs Fund would give people the opportunity of training and, from that, employment. Gordon Brown announced yesterday, I think, that people aged 18 or over would be —

Mr Speaker: Will the Member come to his question?

Mr Butler: I will. It is all well and good to go to North Carolina to look at initiatives, but there

are other models closer to home in these islands. I do not think that the Minister has availed himself of or has been pushing those types of models here to try to get a lot for our young people. Will he be looking at those types of initiative to try to get a lot of our young people into employment and training?

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

There is no inconsistency in putting forward the proposal that I spoke about today and dealing with young people who are struggling to find work. It is a fundamental part of the Department's work. We are not a one-dimensional Department. We have a range of issues to take care of, and, although the initiative is not aimed specifically and directly at the target group that the Member referred to, other departmental initiatives are. Since I came into this job, one of the most concerning issues that we have faced is the absence of essential skills provision for so many young people who do not have basic reading, writing and ICT skills. That is one of the scandals that exist in this country, and it is even more disturbing that so many young people continue to come out of school in a pipeline into that category. The initiative is aimed at a particular part of our departmental remit. It is not excluding groups, because we have initiatives that are focused on young people. In fact, the Department is carrying out a major piece of work on those young people and trying to assess how we can improve our performance in that regard.

The Member mentioned the Future Jobs Fund, and he has written to me in that regard. Northern Ireland has its own initiatives. Over the past couple of years, I have heard that announcements were made in London about great initiatives. In many of those cases, they were reannouncing schemes that they had scrapped a couple of years ago and which we had retained or versions of schemes that we had. Very few of the schemes that have been announced in the past few years by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, which was formerly the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS), which was formerly something else, have been new, and very few of them have brought new money. One will see that those Departments are in retreat with regard to further and higher education and are cutting substantial sums of money from higher and further education, for instance, which we have been able to resist so far.

We are strongly focused on doing something for that group of young people, but the initiative being discussed is aimed at improving job prospects by making it easier and more inviting for indigenous companies to expand or for foreign direct investment companies to settle here. Although that is the aim of that particular initiative, I emphasise that it will not be done to the exclusion of actions that we have taken and will continue to take for young people who are not in education, training or employment.

Rev Dr Robert Coulter: I thank the Minister for his statement, and I commend him on the energy that he and his Department have put into the new initiative. He mentioned cross-cutting working between Departments. Can he outline what co-operation there will be between his Department, DETI and Invest NI to build on the North Carolina model?

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

The relationship between DETI, Invest NI and my Department has been improving steadily over the past couple of years. I have had discussions with the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment. We have had regular meetings with the chief executive of Invest NI. Basically, we looked at the Barnett report and concluded that the best way forward is a much more integrated approach to providing help and encouragement for potential investors, whether they are indigenous or external.

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

Invest NI's client companies have access to the company development programme (CDP) fund that the agency runs. Of course, DETI has responsibility for the development of economic policy in general, while DEL has responsibility for delivery of the skills agenda. If we were to look ahead to 2013, for example, we would see that the European Commission would prevent Invest NI and, indeed, any other similar organisation in the European Union giving grants, whether they are capital or employment grants, beyond a marginal amount. We would also see that the provision of a skilled workforce is Northern Ireland's only asset to encourage people to invest and expand. That will be our main investment tool as we move forward in the next few years. Therefore, the pilot is designed to ensure that we maximise the opportunities that are provided here.

We chose the North Carolina model simply because that state's economy has many

parallels with ours, albeit on a larger scale. It has a big agriculture economy, as well as a tobacco industry, a textiles industry and a big furniture business. Much of the state's economic profile and many businesses that it has lost are similar to ours. The state reacted to the decline of its traditional businesses by concentrating on skills. It told companies that, if they wanted to invest or expand in the state, in certain circumstances it would train up their workforce.

In its model, the state's DETI counterpart, the Department of Commerce, and its DEL counterpart, the community college sector, work together from the very start of the process. If I am permitted, I shall prolong my answer to explain what they do. When the Department of Commerce gets an indication that a company is interested in expansion or investing in the state, it immediately informs the community college sector, which is DEL's equivalent. They put a team together from day one that includes someone who has responsibility for skills and training. That person becomes an integral member of the team that deals with the company in question.

In Northern Ireland's case, Invest NI's client executives would work together with DEL's skills and industry division on one team as soon as initial contact had been made. My Department's representative will look for a specification of the skills and qualifications that a particular investor seeks. The team will then find out whether those skills are available, and, if not, whether they can be provided through a bespoke training process or a buy-in. That will progress on a continuum from further to higher education and will include both.

We are, hopefully, going to do away with some of the current Invest NI schemes, where employers can get money for training but they have to procure the training and claim the cost back from Invest NI. We will replace those schemes with a simple system where we get the specification, and if we need to provide particular training, that training will be provided. There will be no claims, paperwork or bureaucracy; it will be simple. That is the essence of the model, and a prolonged way of answering the Member's question.

11.00 am

However, we want to test this out. A pilot scheme is under way, and we are looking at others. In answer to Mr Weir's question, as with

all these things, the proof of the pudding will be in the eating and in the evaluations in due course. DETI, Invest NI and DEL all agree that we have to pursue this if we are to take the general spirit of the Barnett report and turn it into practice.

Ms Lo: I welcome the Minister's statement. As a member of the Committee for Employment and Learning, I went with the Minister to North Carolina, and I was impressed by the common-sense approach to bridging the skills gap between industry and the colleges.

It is well evidenced that small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) lack managerial skills; the review of economic policy mentioned that. However, we still do not have a PGCE course on business administration in our universities, and that is something that we need to look at. I have been lobbied on the matter on several occasions. A lot of people are returning from industry and want to do a postgraduate certificate with a view to teaching, and that is a common-sense approach to upskilling our managers.

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

The lack of managerial skills is a huge issue for our economy. Last year, Oxford Economics did some work for the then Economic Development Forum, which showed that a relatively modest investment in management and leadership and upskilling at that level would have a significant impact on our GDP, and there is no doubt about that. In the coming months, we will be working with Invest NI to ensure that provision by Invest NI and DEL is consistent and complementary. That will reflect the feedback from recent research, which shows that there is a need for greater clarity for customers on what is available and how it can be accessed with the minimum amount of bureaucracy.

We have spent much time and effort on providing management and leadership courses in the past year. In the current financial year, I have continued to ensure that the courses will be delivered with a 100% grant to companies that avail themselves of the opportunity. So far, hundreds of people have, and we are seized with the strong opinion that it is absolutely critical to our economic success.

I am happy to look at the Member's point about business administration courses in the universities, and I will write to her when I have consulted with the universities to clarify her point. Nevertheless, I assure the Member that we are seized with the

necessity of doing something significant on management leadership. We held five or six roadshows recently where we spoke to local authorities, local businesspeople and other stakeholders around the Province, and this issue was brought to their attention at all of those roadshows. We have had a positive response, with a high take-up rate, and we have agreed to continue to fund those schemes at 100% for the current financial year. Obviously, we will have to look at things thereafter with regard to where the budget takes us.

Ms S Ramsey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. This far down the pecking order, I find that most of the questions have either been asked or answered. As other Members have done, I thank the Minister for his kind words. The statement has to be welcomed. It is a step in the right direction, and I also welcome the work that is being done on the pilot project because we are all aware that, for years, local people have not been trained or have not been skilled up to access jobs that have come here. That has particularly been the case in my constituency, where jobs have come in but local people have not been able to access them. I would appreciate getting more details on the pilot project, because that is something that we should be enthusiastic about.

The review recommended a possible merger of Departments. I would appreciate hearing the Minister's views on that and on the other recommendations in the review. Today's statement outlined movement on only one of the recommendations.

The Minister for Employment and Learning: A merger was one possibility. My response was similar to that of the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment. We must consider the issue closely because the temptation is to believe that cutting Departments will result in the cutting of costs. It does not always work like that. As the Member probably knows, changing the name over the door of an office block will not save much if 750 people are still working there.

The issue is whether duplication could be avoided by merging Departments or whether cutting the number of Departments would broaden their remit and cause them to lose focus. A balance is to be struck, and people misunderstand the issue by thinking that money can be saved by cutting Departments when that is not necessarily the case. Any savings might

only be minimal. It is the people who work in the Departments who cost the money, and if, after Departments are cut, those people are still there, wearing some other hat, the cost would be the same. Work has to be done, and the idea has potential and is something that must be looked into from time to time.

Once Departments are messed around with, it takes around three years to settle them down, because of all the people who would have to apply for their jobs. The process would go on and on. Over the years, I have had some experience in that area, and I know that it takes a long time. I am happy to consider the idea. The circumstances in the world economy are changing all the time, and, therefore, we have to look carefully at whether we have the right model that is fit for purpose in our economic circumstances.

My only feeling on how it might work is that the total remit of DEL and DETI might be too wide. In other words, a merged Department would take on everything from DETI's current responsibilities of consumer affairs, tourism, and so on to my Department's areas that include further and higher education, training and employment and job centres. We would have to ensure that a merged Department would not be too diverse. A model for a merged Department might involve trimming some responsibilities off the edges to keep a strong economic focus. We are happy to consider all those issues, and I will have no hesitation in doing so.

The pilot project is demand led. Invest NI will be the first to know whether a company is thinking of expanding its client base. The idea behind the project is that as soon as Invest NI receives an indication from a company that it wishes to come here or that an existing company wishes to expand, a team will be put together. That team would consist of representatives from DEL's skills and industry division and representatives from Invest NI, and it would carry through the negotiations to a conclusion.

In September 2009, I attended the Clinton Global Initiative in New York, where Declan Kelly organised at short notice a gathering of businesspeople. I made the point that we may well end up training a number of people at risk. If a company were to give us a specification, we would find out whether we had the people and whether we needed to train them up. We

would undertake to do that, but something could happen that would result in the investment not taking place. However, the accredited qualifications that we would have provided would ensure that the skills developed would remain in the workforce and that the time and effort invested would not be lost. That workforce could then form a pool of labour for other companies, and the resource would not, therefore, have been wasted.

Given that that is a pilot project, we must learn from it as it evolves. As I said to the Deputy Chairperson earlier, we will share our thoughts and experiences with the Committee, and we will, I hope, be able to take a joint view on the way forward. We must then prepare our budgets for the next CSR period and decide whether to invest in that project. I hope that the project works and that we invest in it.

Mr Beggs: I thank the Minister for his statement. He referred to the successful economic method that is used in North Carolina and that state's responsive education system. I understand that that successful economic model is recognised internationally. Will the Minister outline how the FE sector locally and the North Carolina model will contribute to improving the skills profile of the Northern Ireland economy? Does the Minister agree that improving workforce skills would secure and improve the prospect of creating more jobs? Does he also agree that international investment, should it come to Northern Ireland, would be much less likely to uproot and move if we invested in people rather than in capital assets that can be moved elsewhere?

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

The Member goes to the very heart of what our future economic development policy should be. In the past, the pattern has been to give capital grants for factories and machinery thereby, effectively, buying in a company. Some people would say that we were bribing companies to come here, but I suspect that that is going too far. We also gave employment grants to companies that provided a certain level of employment. However, as I said, given that we are changing to European Union rules, those days will soon be over.

How many examples have we seen, even in recent months, of companies that received capital grants but had no base, roots or ties in Northern Ireland, so that, when push came

to shove, they either left here to go to the Far East or eastern Europe or they repatriated the business to its original location? All that we ended up doing was shipping the machinery back, and, by that stage, we had gone past the point of being able to get clawback. That machinery was bought and paid for by taxpayers in Northern Ireland, but it is now benefiting a company and workforce somewhere else in the world. We must revisit that issue.

Northern Ireland is not overly blessed with natural resources, but the one resource that we do have is our people. Evidence shows that a company that builds up a meaningful research and development capability in the Province is less likely to move. Most companies tell us that, irrespective of office costs and energy costs, both of which are important, the two things that cost companies most are a high churn rate of staff and an inability to get the right skills for the job and the right management and leadership. If we address those issues, we will retain companies, because that will allow them to make money. Companies are out to make money, so it is our task to provide them, in the long term, with what matters most to them: their workforce. That is how companies make their money, because machinery will come and go. The list of companies here that received grant aid over the years and then left is as long as one's arm. We are trying to pursue a people-based model that gives companies the confidence to know that they will get the workforce that they need.

11.15 am

The Member asked specifically how the local FE sector will contribute. As he knows, over the past couple of years, we have been steadily refocusing the further education sector to make it a major tool of economic development. The sector provides a growing proportion of training for people of all ages. Investment in the further education sector, which we have maintained, has practically rebuilt the entire estate. We still have some way to go, but the end is in sight, and in a few years' time, there will be a state-of-the-art further education estate across the Province. In those circumstances, and with the refocusing of the further education sector as a major tool of economic development, the sector will have a major role to play. Indeed, the sector is our principal tool for ensuring successful economic development locally.

The formation of workforce development forums around each of the regional colleges will bring in local stakeholders and businesses and work with local authorities. That means that the process will become demand led. In other words, employers will tell colleges what they need, and the colleges will try to deliver. Previously, it was a supply-driven system, in that the colleges decided what courses to put on regardless of whether people wanted them. Those days are gone, and we are now focused on delivery at a level that ensures that the FE sector responds locally and specifically to the needs of business.

Mr P Ramsey: I welcome the Minister's statement and look forward to the rolling out and assessment of the pilot project. However, I want to talk about the provision of a skilled workforce. Tomorrow, the Committee for Employment and Learning will be briefed by the Department on the workforce future skills needs analysis. A key theme to emerge from that briefing is:

"The sub-regional reports indicate that this is an issue which will impact on ... Northern Ireland. Indeed, not all sub-regions shared equally in the 'golden era'."

That "golden era" refers to the past decade. The Minister referred to the workforce development forums, and the departmental briefing continues:

"The North West WDF report, which includes the Derry, Limavady and Strabane Council areas, points out that employment growth in the region lagged behind other areas of Northern Ireland over the last decade."

Given the Minister's concerns when he met a number of civic leaders in Derry, and following his meeting with the deputy First Minister and the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, will he outline the Executive's regeneration proposals? Will he also ensure that an economic emphasis is placed on the regeneration of the north-west?

The Minister for Employment and Learning: I never fail to be impressed by how the Member manages to get his local point across during such debates. However, I know how sincerely he, and his colleagues who represent the area, feel. I have never denied that the situation in the north-west is proportionately worse than in other regions. I have stated that openly and made it absolutely clear to Members. It is no

secret and I have stated what is obvious. Any attempt to hide that or to sweep it under the carpet would serve no purpose. The Member will also know that I have been to the city several times and, some months ago, I had a successful meeting in the Guildhall. A number of major projects are under way, including what I hope will be a successful project involving the University of Ulster and the Letterkenny Institute of Technology. I am confident that that project will come to fruition in the not too distant future.

There is a certain degree of inevitability about the regional variations that exist. However, our task involves dealing with a number of issues. In common with others, the Member is focused on higher education provision in the area. From working with the local authorities in the region, I am satisfied with the emphasis that we have placed on trying to respond to significant job losses in the area. That has been a challenge, and we have faced huge problems, including the huge blow of the closure of Seagate in Limavady. As you will be aware, Mr Deputy Speaker, there have been similar issues in Coleraine, and, indeed, there has been a general difficulty in the Maiden City itself, where some of the major employers have been, and continue to be, under stress. We had call centre issues last August, which are still there; the names have changed, but the problems remain.

I am under no illusion that there are major and specific issues in that region. Through the FE sector, the higher education sector and our employment service, the Department has to respond to all those issues. Unfortunately, we have had to put a lot of time and effort into dealing with that, and staff in the job centres of the area, as well as the local and district managers, have been doing a lot of work to deal with the situation as it arises, including setting up redundancy clinics and taking other measures.

There is something in the proposal for the Member, because if any indigenous or external investor is identified for the region that he represents, we will put a team together along with Invest NI and work to provide a skilled workforce for that investor. We will do that without bureaucracy and without cost to the employer. That is the essence of the model.

Invest NI has a specific role with some of the major employers, which we understand. However, where assistance is required with either upskilling

or training, we are happy to develop a bespoke programme for any company in that region. We are happy to sit down and talk to a company about that and to be as flexible as we can. Under no circumstances do I deny the fundamental point that that region requires special attention, as demonstrated by the statistics. I do not seek to hide that for one minute.

Mrs Long: I thank the Minister for his statement this morning and welcome the initiative that he has shown. I want to ask about the threshold of job creation that was referred to in the North Carolina model; I think that it was 12 jobs. I can see that that is a reasonable threshold to set for foreign direct investment (FDI) and for larger indigenous employers. However, if we are growing local entrepreneurship, there must be an emphasis on small and medium-sized enterprises in Northern Ireland, which may have very limited training budgets.

Therefore, is the 12-job threshold the one that the Minister will be using in the pilot projects? Will there be any similar opportunities for businesses that may want to grow on a smaller scale, particularly small businesses, which often need to expand after 18 months? Although the number of jobs created by those businesses might be slightly smaller, will there be similar training support for them?

The Minister for Employment and Learning: I am glad that the Member asked that question, because it raised an issue that I did not touch on in previous answers. People may ask why the job threshold is 12, and to some extent, it is an arbitrary figure. The initiative is a pilot, so all the issues will have to be reviewed in light of experience.

To clarify, although an existing company might state that it is expanding by 12, it might have paid off 20 staff. Therefore, we are proposing to take a three-year average of the number of people employed by a company. We would work from the highest point in those three years, and the training of an additional 12 staff would be paid for from that point. In other words, people could not split their companies in two, call them different names and get training for 12 additional staff paid for in each one, nor could they pay off, for example, 20 staff and take on 12 different people. We have to look at that aspect.

The Member is asking whether some companies would be able to expand at a lesser scale if they could not meet the threshold. We will evaluate

the scheme as it operates. I have no ideological hang-up on any particular number; 12 was an arbitrary number. As over 90% of our businesses are very small, it is incumbent on us to look at anything that will help. If that requires a revision of the job threshold number, either up or down, we should have no difficulty in looking at that in the evaluation process.

Ministerial Statement

Marine Bill: Public Consultation on Policy Proposals

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): With your permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, I will make a statement about public consultation on policy proposals in relation to Northern Ireland's marine environment.

I launch that consultation process today, and it will bring us an important step closer to the introduction of a Northern Ireland marine Bill to the Assembly in 2011. That Bill will provide the legislative framework for a brand new marine planning system for Northern Ireland's seas and will create greater provision for marine nature conservation. Moreover, it will bring us a step closer to finalising and putting in place a robust marine framework that will ensure sustainable use of our seas for generations to come.

Today, I intend to set out in more detail what I want to achieve for Northern Ireland's marine environment, why I consider there to be a pressing need for change and how I intend to bring about such change. I will describe a marine programme that will transform how we manage our marine environment.

However, this is not the start of the process — far from it. Much work has already been done towards achieving our goal. In 2008, the Executive gave their approval to the development of a legislative framework that will result in a more sustainable approach being taken to the marine environment. The proposals that I launch today and the work that has been completed to date will do just that. Those changes will help us to manage our seas in a more sustainable way and will ensure that Northern Ireland maximises the environmental, economic and social benefits of its seas now and in the future.

Work on that transformation is well under way and is based on three interlocking pieces of legislation, the first of which is the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009, which extends, in part, to Northern Ireland. The Act provides for the adoption of a UK-wide marine policy statement that will enable us to advance the

proposed marine planning system in unison with the rest of the UK. The Act establishes my Department as the marine plan authority for the offshore region. The latest marine policy proposals mirror that position by proposing that my Department should also be the marine plan authority for the inshore region.

The second part of the legislative jigsaw will signal the transposition of the marine strategy framework directive on a UK-wide basis this summer. That European directive will require us to achieve, or to maintain, good environmental status in our marine environment by 2020. The marine policy statement and the marine plans will play a key role in helping the UK to deliver its obligations under that directive, its other international commitments and its domestic priorities.

The Northern Ireland marine Bill is the third part of the jigsaw. The first step is consultation on the policy proposals, and I formally launch that process today. The Bill will complete the picture and will be introduced to the Assembly in 2011. That remains in line with the timetable that was announced to the Assembly in March 2009. All the considerable work that has been done has put us in a strong position. Northern Ireland can expect to have an integrated and coherent marine plan in place by 2014. That is our goal, and we will achieve it within exactly the same timescales as other parts of the UK.

As Minister of the Environment, one of my key goals has been to ensure that Northern Ireland has a streamlined, efficient and effective planning system. The extensive reforms that I recently outlined to the Assembly will ensure that we have a planning system that serves the needs of the people. That system will support the Executive in promoting economic growth.

The time has come for marine planning to have similar prominence to that of land use planning in Northern Ireland. Therefore, the significance of the marine policy proposals should not be underestimated. They will pave the way for a completely new and strategic system of planning for our seas. There is no doubt about the scale of the task; it is ambitious. I will heed the lessons learned from land use planning reform and, where possible, apply them to the marine environment. I expect the outcome to be the same: a proactive, co-ordinated and responsive planning system that enables us to achieve sustainable development.

Members will share my view that our seas are a precious resource; they are a way of life for many people. They provide important shipping lanes, unprecedented opportunities for the development of renewable energy and can accommodate the growth of leisure and recreational activities. All those elements can help to bolster our economy.

Importantly, they also provide a vital livelihood for fishing communities and are, at the same time, home to rare and important marine life.

11.30 am

Anyone who still holds the view that our seas are a limitless resource is out of touch with the reality of the situation. Competition for our seas' space is growing fast. There is increasing potential for conflict among activities such as navigation, fisheries, habitat and species conservation, heritage and pollution control. All those activities can have an effect on the marine environment. For that reason, we must look after our seas. We must manage them, and we must act now. The marine planning process will help us to do that.

Marine planning will help us to be proactive about the way in which we use and protect our marine resources. It will identify the interactions between activities that affect those resources and help us to bring together and clarify our marine policies. Marine planning will ensure that those policies are implemented through the decisions that affect what happens in the marine environment. It will create a framework for consistent and evidence-based decision-making. The marine planning process will ultimately provide the basis for future sustainable management and decision-making in the marine environment. Through extensive public engagement, marine planning will give everyone with an interest in our seas the chance to shape how the marine environment is managed.

Marine planning should address not only the current situation but emerging and future uses and technologies, such as carbon capture and storage, renewable energy sources and new marine protected areas. Marine planning will also anticipate changing economic and social trends and the impacts of climate change. It will include the resources in an area, changing ecosystems, seasonal patterns and migration routes.

Let me be clear: I want to support those who make a living from our seas and to ensure that they are not placed at an economic disadvantage to their competitors elsewhere. At the same time, I will ensure that no unnecessary obstacles are placed in the way of investors. Marine activities will be regulated proportionately and on the basis of the risks posed. The UK-wide marine policy statement has a critical role to play in advancing the marine programme, as it will set out the key policy priorities and objectives for all the UK's waters. In effect, it will complement the regional development strategy on land. A pre-consultation exercise on the draft UK-wide marine policy statement began on 12 March 2010. I encourage everyone with an interest in the marine environment to read it and provide my Department with comments.

Northern Ireland's contribution to the marine policy statement will be subject to Executive agreement. The marine policy statement must also be laid before the Assembly before it is adopted. The close involvement of Northern Ireland Departments will, therefore, be central to the whole process's success. I also want to ensure that the marine environment is properly protected and safeguarded. I intend to establish in Northern Ireland's waters marine conservation zones, which will provide a flexible designation regime based on social, economic and environmental considerations. The levels of protection that will be afforded could range from very minimal through to highly protected zones, where no human activity would be permitted.

I expect that the designation of marine conservation zones in the development of the marine plan will assist developers and give them certainty so that they will know where they can and cannot develop. Marine conservation zones should identify the location of important areas for marine biodiversity and will indicate from the outset where licensing restrictions or conditions may be applied. Such zones and the areas around them can also stimulate increased stocks of certain fish species. Marine tourism can also benefit through greater opportunities for viewing marine wildlife on boat trips or by scuba diving and snorkelling.

A close working relationship with the other UK Administrations has been and will continue to be essential in implementing this programme of work. All reasonable steps will be taken to achieve compatibility between marine plans that are adjacent to each other. Indeed, it will be a

requirement that each of the UK Administrations should notify one another of their intention to plan near the borders of their marine region. Similarly, Northern Ireland's marine waters about those of the Republic of Ireland. It will be important that regional co-operation be effective there.

Consistency in approach will be adopted where appropriate. To facilitate this, there is a separate five Administrations working group on marine planning, which is attended by my officials, those of the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government in the Republic of Ireland and officials from GB. The working group provides a further forum for discussion between jurisdictions and is just one of a number of ongoing initiatives that have provided my officials with useful opportunities for learning and exchange.

Another example has been the pilot projects that have been undertaken elsewhere in the UK, and we can study the evidence and learn from the experiences that emerge. We can further use that learning and apply it to suit the needs of Northern Ireland. That will be in addition to the wealth of information already available such as that gathered by the Irish Sea Conservation Zones project. More information will be available shortly: for example, a UK-wide report — 'Charting Progress 2' — will provide an updated and improved assessment of the state of the UK's seas.

My Department, in collaboration with other agencies, will also publish a state of the seas report for Northern Ireland. This will be an important evidence-gathering exercise, and it will give us vital information about our seas and help to inform and underpin the decisions that we will need to take on marine planning.

My Department has responsibility for the majority of marine functions: marine planning, marine nature conservation and the bulk of marine licensing all rest with DOE. However, it is essential that the other Departments with marine responsibilities — the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI), the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL), the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) and the Department for Regional Development (DRD) — continue to remain closely involved with my Department as the proposals move forward.

All of Northern Ireland's various interests must be reflected in the final marine plan. It will be through pursuing a close, collaborative approach that the necessary integration will be achieved. We must continue to move forward and work together to make the right decisions by managing and planning for our seas and safeguarding them for the future. We will continue our stakeholder engagement throughout the process with Departments and others who have an interest in the marine environment.

Consultation on the policy proposals marks the latest stage in our commitment to ongoing engagement. I am pleased to announce the launch of those policy proposals for a draft Northern Ireland marine Bill today. The consultation runs until 9 July 2010 and can be viewed on and downloaded from the DOE website. I want as many people as possible to play a role in shaping the process of a new marine planning system, because it is those who use the seas who have the greatest understanding of it and have the most to gain from the proposals.

The Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment (Mr Boylan): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Fáiltím roimh ráiteas an Aire. I welcome the Minister's statement. The Committee has been well briefed on the Minister's policy proposals for a draft marine Bill and largely commends his aspirations for improving the marine environment through the introduction of marine planning, better marine nature conservation and a further streamlining of marine licensing. However, the Committee is extremely disappointed by the absence of any indication that the Minister will use this opportunity to look at how those marine functions might be delivered more efficiently.

The Minister clearly recognised in his statement that it is imperative for other Departments with marine responsibilities to work together to deliver the proposals, but the Committee has been provided with evidence that the current fragmented nature of marine function delivery will lead to greater costs and an inability to improve efficiencies and will perpetuate the burdensome bureaucracy faced by industry when trying to develop marine projects. Will the Minister explain why he has rejected the opportunity to look at more efficient and cheaper ways of delivering marine functions across the North?

The Minister of the Environment: The Member appears to suggest that more responsibility for the delivery of services for marine areas should be taken by one Department. If the Member and the Committee are serious about that, I suggest that they put forward proposals, because I have indicated that four Departments are involved. We will seek to work with all Departments to bring them together and to do so in a cohesive and efficient manner. I have no doubt that that could be done more efficiently if it were all under one Department. If that is the Member's suggestion, he should develop the proposals in the Committee and bring them forward. We will be happy to look at them.

Mr Weir: I thank the Minister for his statement. I note that there is a joint forum between the five jurisdictions. Will the Minister indicate how often that forum meets? There has been much talk about joined-up government on this issue. Is it the intention to provide a one-stop shop for marine planning that becomes the main body to deal with marine planning issues?

The Minister of the Environment: I will ascertain how often that group meets. We want to move towards having a one-stop shop. There are huge opportunities for development on our seas. There are a lot of resources out there that can be harnessed and used in an environmentally sensitive way. We want a situation in which the people who are engaged in development on the seas are given clear guidance on what can and cannot be done. We will seek to identify what needs specific protection in our seas. Some areas will require a high level of protection. In other areas, there are significant opportunities to harness the existing natural resources and use them for the benefit of us all. One of the key purposes of the Bill is to identify how that can be done and to have a clear and consistent approach to marine planning thereafter.

Mr Kinahan: I thank the Minister for his statement and welcome very many of the proposals. In the statement, the Minister said that there will be an integrated and coherent marine plan. He was clear about the importance of the precious resource for jobs and that it is a limitless resource. Early last year, I attended a lecture by Professor Jackson at Queen's University, Belfast. I wonder —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question, Mr Kinahan.

Mr Kinahan: It is coming.

I wonder how the Minister intends to pull together scientists' often opposing views. The fishing industry often has scientists who have completely different views from others who are trying to protect the same resource. Will Lough Neagh be included in the plan?

The Minister of the Environment: There has been divergence in the opinions of scientists and fishermen for many years. The biggest mistake as regards our fishermen was Britain giving up many of its fishing rights when it entered the EEC, now the European Union. As a consequence of that, there has been huge overfishing by other European countries in waters that were once used solely by fishermen from British ports. Much of the overfishing that has caused damage was not carried out by fishermen from Northern Ireland or the UK but by fishermen from other countries.

As regards marrying the two sets of opinions, science probably needs to give more cognisance to what fishermen identify and see themselves. Those fishermen are out on the sea day in, day out, week in, week out. Probably no one else knows the seas as well as the people who fish on a regular basis. Their views should not be dismissed glibly by people from a scientific background.

This marine policy deals with the sea as opposed to inland waters and, therefore, will not deal with Lough Neagh. It will deal with the seas in all our coastal regions.

Mrs D Kelly: I welcome the Minister's statement and lend my support to the request for a proposal for a single marine organisation, a matter on which the Committee received representation from a number of bodies. Surely it is the Minister's job to negotiate with his Executive colleagues to make that happen, rather than a job for the Committee.

The Minister outlined how he wishes to have a proactive and co-ordinated system approach. When might we see the river basin management plans?

11.45 pm

The Minister of the Environment: I wish the Member well as she moves to pastures green and helps to create a better educated and more skilled workforce in Northern Ireland. That is an important task.

I believe that my Department is doing the right thing in producing this marine policy, working closely with the UK Government in the delivery of their marine strategy, introducing a Bill as set out in the timescales and having the work completed for 2014. It will provide considerably greater clarity, and it will better inform individuals who need to talk to government about which Department they should approach.

I believe that we are doing the right thing; however, the Committee thinks that the Department should go further. That being the case, I suggested that the Committee identify how we should go about it. If the Committee thinks we are not doing things correctly, it should set out alternative proposals. That challenge stands.

Mr B Wilson: I thank the Minister for his report and for the Bill.

Most aspects of the Bill are very welcome. However, there are a number of issues. First, the UK Bill proposes the reform of fisheries, something that is not included in the Northern Ireland Bill. Secondly, the UK Bill proposes the establishment of a marine management organisation, an independent body to administer, manage and enforce environmental protection laws. Why were those aspects not included in our Bill?

The Minister of the Environment: Northern Ireland is a part of the United Kingdom, but it has its own peculiarities and specialisms. We need a Bill that recognises that. For example, fishing has been important to Northern Ireland. It has provided many thousands of jobs in Northern Ireland and still does. I will not go down a route that will hugely endanger the economies of Portavogie, Kilkeel and Ardglass, where people have used marine resources wisely for hundreds of years. I am not going to hammer fishermen. It is possible to marry environmental and economic needs in Northern Ireland. I do not want the Executive to take action that does huge damage and is of great detriment to the fishing industry.

Mr Ross: I thank the Minister for his statement. He is aware that renewable and new technologies are a key part of Northern Ireland's future, and those include wind power and wave power. Will the Minister outline for the House how those renewable technologies fit in with the marine Bill?

The Minister of the Environment: The marine Bill will be hugely beneficial in identifying what

can be done to harness the energy of the seas. There are huge opportunities for Northern Ireland to produce significant amounts of renewable energy that can be used locally or potentially exported. We need to be in a position to harness that energy. For example, if tidal power in Rathlin Sound and off the north coast were harnessed, we could potentially do away with two power stations in Northern Ireland or produce power equivalent to their output. That could be controversial, and it may have an impact on the landscape and on the natural environment. However, that is the significance of the renewable energy available. We have carried out some work on tidal power in the straits at Strangford. The apparatus produces enough power to run the village of Strangford, and there is potential to do much more both in Strangford and in the northern part of Northern Ireland.

The marine policy Bill will, however, enable us to identify what we can and cannot do in an environmentally sensitive way. What we have done in Strangford, for example, is being used worldwide, because that is such an environmentally sensitive area. We have already achieved a considerable amount of renewable energy with that system, with minimal impact on the marine environment in spite of its sensitive location. Therefore, much more can be achieved, and the Bill will allow us to take major steps to meet our target of deriving 40% of Northern Ireland's energy from renewable sources by 2020 and, hopefully, to exceed that target.

Mrs Long: I welcome the Minister's statement, particularly the intention to introduce marine conservation zones with the potential to protect and enhance marine biodiversity. However, given the fragmentation of responsibility, particularly at the interface between the marine environment and the littoral environment, is the Minister concerned that the ability to protect those areas is weakened by the lack of independent oversight, for example, by an independent environmental protection agency that could look at issues such as the quality of water discharged into the marine environment by other Departments and their agencies?

The Minister of the Environment: There is no fragmentation between Departments. The marine planning processes will, inescapably, drive integration and formalise arrangements between Departments. Preparation of the marine Bill and further reform of licensing will be done in conjunction with Departments that have

marine functions. Therefore, we will take a close collaborative approach, and coherence will be achieved by the interdepartmental marine co-ordination group. Everything will be drawn together for the common good and will require the approval of the Executive.

Stringent systems are in place to measure deposits going into the sea, and such systems already operate for beaches. The marine planning process will complement existing directives, which have contributed to improvements in, for example, beaches and bathing water. The process will, for the first time, take a holistic view of the marine area and will manage and regulate marine activity so that it is within environmental limits, thereby minimising the impact of human activity. That should have a beneficial effect on our waters for bathers and for marine diversity.

Mr Beggs: I thank the Minister for his statement. During my conversations with Portland Gas representatives, they expressed surprise at the number of government bodies and agencies with which they had to deal to get planning approval in the marine environment for natural gas storage under Larne Lough. That adds administrative cost to the Civil Service and extends company development times and costs. Other companies are looking at the marine environment for renewable energy development, particularly B9 Energy at Torr Head. The Minister indicated that, under current proposals, there will be a maritime policy statement and maritime plan by 2014. Will he tell us how long developments in the marine environment will have to suffer the present bureaucratic system, with its additional costs and lead times, so that the Committee can determine whether it is worth the effort to act to have those times shortened? Do his Department or the Executive have any proposals on that?

The Minister of the Environment: The Northern Ireland Executive have not brought about the problem with oil and gas; that remains the responsibility of the Department of Energy and Climate Change. All oil and gas exploration is dealt with through the UK Administration, as opposed to the Northern Ireland Administration. Therefore, I have no responsibility for that matter, which has not been devolved to Northern Ireland and was certainly not part of things yesterday.

The Member raised the issue of applicants having to deal with more than one Northern Ireland Department in order to get planning approval. The different permissions that may be required

are generally sector-specific. No single regime satisfies all the European and international obligations and commitments. For example, many sectoral regimes do not include sufficient environmental provisions because those are incidental to their main purpose. Moreover, they are open-minded about the possibility of disapplication through the use of exemptions or special arrangements and aim to reduce the burden on business through the further streamlining of licensing, where possible. We will seek as far as possible to ensure that there is joined-up government for people who are approaching Departments for permission for specific activities associated with marine life. In certain instances, that will not be achievable through one Department, so applicants will have to operate across a number of Departments.

Dr Farry: I thank the Minister for his statement. I want to ask him about the Bill's indicative timetable. He said that the consultation will close in July and that a Bill will be introduced in 2011. Can the Minister clarify when he sees the Bill being passed by the Assembly, particularly bearing in mind that his Department has a large legislative programme coming up? Given our lack of a clear regulatory framework for marine matters, if there is a delay, does the Minister foresee any potential dangers in attracting investment in renewables, especially if we fall behind other UK regions?

The Minister of the Environment: In saying that we will be ready to go for legislation in 2011, I suspect that we will not introduce the Bill in the early part of 2011, because it would be impossible to have a Bill driven through before the Assembly election. I suspect that the process will kick in during the later part of 2011 — it could be in June, but it is more likely to be in the autumn of 2011 — to be completed around one year after that, which is the length of time that it normally takes from a Bill's introduction to its getting Royal Assent. We can achieve all the targets that we have set out and have all the work completed and in place for 2014, in line with the other United Kingdom regions. We are not falling behind. We are in a strong position to sell ourselves and the marine resources that Northern Ireland has to offer and to do that in a way that is sustainable and will produce a much more sustainable environmental economy by properly utilising the resources in our seas.

Executive Committee Business

Waste and Contaminated Land (Amendment) Bill: Second Stage

The Minister of the Environment (Mr Poots): I beg to move

That the Second Stage of the Waste and Contaminated Land (Amendment) Bill [NIA 10/09] be agreed.

I want to give Members a brief overview of the Bill, to summarise its purpose and to comment on some of its key features. Before doing so, I will say something about the context of the Bill.

I view the Waste and Contaminated Land (Amendment) Bill as a crucial component in our efforts to manage waste. Northern Ireland's environment is one of its greatest assets, and we need to do everything in our power to protect, enhance and conserve it. That means ensuring that waste is properly managed.

I will start with an overview of the legislation. The Bill, which I introduced to the Assembly on 22 March, contains three main elements. First, it amends the existing statutory framework for the management of waste on land. Secondly, it makes some changes to the legislative framework for land that is being contaminated by pollution. Finally, it makes a minor amendment to the existing producer responsibility legislation — essentially to clarify existing statutory provision.

I will now outline briefly the purpose of the Bill. I introduced the Bill last month for two main reasons. First, the implementation of a number of the commitments made in the 2006-2020 Northern Ireland waste management strategy requires primary legislation to be passed. The Bill provides a vehicle for doing that.

12.00 noon

Secondly, ongoing engagement with key stakeholders has identified a number of areas in which legislation needs to be changed. The changes are designed to enhance the existing statutory framework for waste management and contaminated land and to make it easier to enforce the legislation.

I turn now to the Bill's key features. Members will no doubt be relieved to hear that I do not propose to go through the provisions clause by

clause. However, I shall mention three specific issues. First, members will have noted that the Bill proposes new powers for councils to deal with illegal waste activity, ranging from minor fly-tipping offences to much more serious criminal activity. In the main, these proposals were prompted by discussions with local government. A number of councils requested a more proactive role in dealing with breaches of waste management legislation. I see considerable merit in that suggestion. Therefore, the Bill seeks to legislate for an effective partnership between the Department and local government in tackling illegal waste disposal. The proposed new powers for councils will allow them to investigate illegal waste activity and to prosecute suspected offenders. In addition, clean-up powers, which are currently the preserve of councils, will be extended to the Department.

However, I recognise that legislative change alone cannot resolve the problems that are associated with illegal waste. That brings me to the second issue that I want to cover. My officials are already working with local government representatives to develop a fly-tipping protocol. That protocol should clearly establish the respective roles and responsibilities of the Department and councils when dealing with fly-tipped waste. In other words, it will help to determine who does what. I anticipate that the new legislation will not commence until the new protocol is in place.

Finally, I shall mention briefly the contaminated land provisions in the Bill. The Bill will amend the legislative framework in Part III of the Waste and Contaminated Land (Northern Ireland) Order 1997, which, in effect, establishes procedures to identify and restore contaminated land and to ensure that those who cause contamination pay for its treatment. I acknowledge that Part III of the Order has yet to be brought into operation. However, the proposed amendments in the Bill reflect the lessons that have been learned through experience of operating the legislation in England and Wales. The changes should help to ensure that, whenever the legislation commences, Northern Ireland has a more effective contaminated land regime.

In conclusion, I hope that I have given Members a broad perspective of the Waste and Contaminated Land (Amendment) Bill and of some of its key features. Of course, at the end of the debate, I will be happy to answer Members' questions on any aspect of the legislation.

The Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment (Mr Boylan): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the former Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment for her contribution to the Committee, and I wish her well in her new post.

Cuirim fáilte roimh an Bhille. I welcome the Bill, which will assist us in meeting our EU landfill diversion targets. It will enable councils to contribute to the delivery of the Department's waste management strategy commitments, and it will enhance the Department's and councils' waste management controls by amending the existing legislative framework for the management of waste and contaminated land.

The Committee is acutely aware of the need for waste management legislation. Last October, when the Committee visited Brussels, members were briefed by a senior official, who made it blatantly clear that the European Commission places immense importance on waste issues. The 1999 EU landfill directive set targets for 2010, 2013 and 2020 for member states to reduce the amount of biodegradable municipal waste that is sent to landfill. In the North, by 2010, the amount of waste that is sent to landfill must be reduced to 75% of the 1995 figure, and it must fall to 50% by 2013 and 35% by 2020. Those targets are very challenging, but they must be met in order to avoid costly EU infraction proceedings. It is hoped that the Bill will go some way to enabling those targets to be achieved.

However, we must not forget that the Bill is not just about complying with Europe. It is about providing and producing a safer, healthier and more environmentally friendly place for all of us in the North to live in.

Departmental officials briefed the Committee at its meeting on 15 October 2009 on the synopsis of responses to the consultation on the draft Bill. The Committee heard that the majority of respondents supported the proposals, but members picked up on a few areas of concern, one of which was in relation to the Water Order 1999. The removal of that Order might greatly weaken the Bill, as, in effect, an offence would become much more difficult to prove. That would run the risk of further illegal dumping of a variety of materials without any suitable redress.

Departmental officials advised that, having considered the comments, the Minister believed

that other provisions already in place to deal with illegal waste were sufficient and that he had decided not to introduce that provision at this stage. That is an issue that the Committee will, no doubt, revisit at the Bill's Committee Stage.

Members also made it clear at that meeting that people must be aware of the cost implications of decisions. Costs should not simply be shared among everyone. Accountability must be built into charging decisions so that people recognise their responsibility for waste and are charged for its management in a way that encourages good practice. That is something that Members will look at closely during the Bill's Committee Stage.

The Committee welcomes specific proposals in the Bill to give local councils the power to issue fixed penalty notices for fly-tipping. We are all aware of instances of fly-tipping and the cost and resources that are involved in cleaning it up. Fly-tipping blights our society, and any enhanced powers for councils to lead on combating it are to be welcomed.

The Committee recently received an update from the Department stating that the Minister had decided not to pursue enabling legislation for a single waste authority at this time. It is fair to say that the issue of a single waste authority has split opinion. The Committee has sought to obtain more information on concerns raised by local authorities, councillors, political parties and the waste groups. For some, the single waste authority flies in the face of decentralisation and contradicts the move to give more power to local authorities by reducing the influence of locally elected councillors. Others feel that it is important to manage waste in the most economical way possible and that the rationalisation of three waste-management groups into one waste authority could maximise efficiency. However, that is no longer an issue for this Bill: it is a matter that Members will have a chance to debate again in the future.

In conclusion, as soon as the House passes the Bill's Second Stage, the Committee will call for written submissions from interested organisations and individuals and its members will be extremely interested in hearing all views. I look forward to a good ongoing working relationship with departmental officials to ensure that the Committee is able to scrutinise legislation properly. On behalf of the Committee, I support the principles of the Bill and look

forward to scrutinising it at Committee Stage. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr Weir: I join the Committee Chairperson in thanking the outgoing Chairperson of the Environment Committee, Mrs Kelly. Whether by good or bad luck, she has been appointed Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning, of which I have been made Deputy Chairperson. In that regard, we cannot escape each other.

The Bill highlights something that has, rightly, been broadly welcomed. For a long time, a common complaint, particularly against direct rule Government, was that waste management was a Cinderella service and that waste issues were often put on the long finger. There was a feeling that direct rule Ministers failed to give waste management the priority that it deserved. It is important that the proper focus of recent years be maintained. There has been a degree of catch-up under devolution to try to ensure that Northern Ireland meets its waste targets. That process must be facilitated, and the Bill will benefit that greatly.

Although it is not the subject of this Bill, there has been, as the Chairperson of the Committee indicated, a lot of controversy over the establishment of a single waste authority. I understand some of the concerns, but I would eventually like to see such an authority. In dealing with waste, whatever structures we employ must ensure maximum efficiency to meet our waste targets.

Meeting our waste targets is very much a win-win situation because the Province will not be faced with fines and additional undue burdens from the European Union. Also, as was highlighted by the Minister, removing waste and dealing with contaminated land is in everyone's interest because it will ultimately help our natural environment. One of the greatest assets that we have in Northern Ireland is the beauty of our landscape. Unfortunately, some people irresponsibly dump their waste.

I declare an interest as vice president of the Northern Ireland Local Government Association. The local government family has been looking for these proposals for some time. I welcome the proposals that have been put forward by the Minister. This issue very much shows co-operation between central and local government to deliver a solution to a very practical problem. Embracing the changes in this legislation will

be of benefit to local communities and Northern Ireland as a whole. Consequently, I give my wholehearted support to this legislation. Like other Members, I look forward to scrutinising the details in Committee as we move forward.

Mr Kinahan: I declare an interest as a south Antrim councillor and as a member of Arc21, albeit a substitute. I wish our ex-Chairperson all the best in her new post.

I particularly welcome the chance to speak today because I have always been very keen on anything to do with litter and waste. I know that all of us will have seen a simple example of a litter lout. That can carry all the way through to appalling misuse of waste. Yesterday, when I was driving into Belfast, somebody in a 4x4 in front of me threw out packets and things. That is the sort of person who, if he were taken into industry, would throw out a bag or two of rubbish. If he were taken further, he would dump his rubbish over somebody's wall.

This legislation is very much part of keeping Northern Ireland beautiful. I welcome many aspects of the Bill, particularly the fact that it learns from England and Wales. I welcome especially the choice of being able to use a fixed penalty, although I have slight concerns. In council, when we wanted to prosecute somebody for throwing litter, we issued an £80 fine, but it cost us just under £1,000 to take them to court. We need to make sure that those costs are taken into account.

I also welcome the powers of seizure, which are quite excellent and are a good way of punishing anyone. I welcome especially the fact that district councils are being given the power to deal with waste, but I will move on as there are various "however"s that come in. I am concerned that the Department will hold the enforcement regulations but the councils will take the risks. We will need a very good line of communication between the Department and the councils, but I take it on board that the fly-tipping protocol is an example of that sort of communication.

On a more minor but important point, if we take into account what happened in Mallusk, where a mass of industrial waste was dumped into the waterways that are underneath the industrial companies, we need to clarify the word "saturation". Pollution of that type is not just saturation. It went all the way through the Six Mile Water, the other rivers and into Lough

Neagh and killed all the fish. The meaning of “saturation” should be clarified because there will be different degrees, right through to a minor piece of pollution at the tail end of a river.

I am also concerned that we will not be able to deal with contamination of controlled waste. If someone were to dump illegal waste on top of controlled waste, we must have a way of dealing with that. However, my greatest concern relates to councils. In my council, we are often averse to taking risks, but if we are to set an example and punish people who have dumped waste illegally, we need to be willing to take a much higher degree of risk. Within that, we need legal expertise in the Department that we can rely on.

Finally, cost recovery is linked to that. I can see it being enormously expensive for councils to take people to court and punish them. We need total support from the Department, particularly when councils have to decide whether to take someone to court. We also need to ensure that fines compensate councils for all their work.

I support much of the Bill. It is a very good Bill. I look forward to seeing it coming through the Committee, and I congratulate the staff for their work so far.

12.15 pm

Mrs D Kelly: I thank the Minister and other members of the Committee for the Environment for their good wishes to me in my new role as Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning. I wish them well. The Committee and its staff are very hard-working, and the Minister still intends to bring the legislative programme before the Committee in the coming weeks and months.

The Minister said that the legislation will give councils more powers of clean-up; therefore, I declare an interest as a member of Craigavon Borough Council. I wish to ask the Minister for some clarity around the cost of clean-up. In Craigavon, in the past couple of weeks, laundered fuel was dumped and, unfortunately, the ratepayer will have to pick up the clean-up bill, which will be thousands of pounds. As many Members will know, one of the difficulties, unfortunately, is that the polluter pays principle is not yet in vogue in the North and, when people are brought before the courts, the fines are so small that they do not act as a deterrent. Therefore, I ask the Minister to take up that issue with the new Minister of Justice sooner

rather than later. Fines need to be more of a deterrent for people.

Furthermore, will the Minister outline whether ratepayers and councils will get the power of clean-up? For example, if money is taken back under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002, some of it could be distributed among councils that have had to deal with waste and clean-up of contaminated land, or an incentive could be provided, such as tax credits for landfill operators, which are a great way for communities to benefit from some of the taxes that are levied on waste. Does the Minister have any proposals or thoughts about that?

I welcome greater clarity over who does what, because people often feel that they get the runaround when they phone their local council or the Environment Agency, and people do not know who is responsible for what. That information, and clarity around that, is to be welcomed.

The Bill is a good piece of legislation, which I am sure the Committee will seek to improve where possible. I wish it well, and I am pleased to see it before the House this afternoon.

Mrs Long: I support the Second Stage of the Bill, and I too declare an interest as a member of Belfast City Council. Waste disposal and treatment must be tightly controlled if we are to be able to protect our environment for future generations. A real danger is posed by the illegal disposal of waste, and it is much more fundamental than simply being an eyesore in many cases. The damage that can be caused by the dispersal of polluting material via waterborne and airborne transport, and by other means, can present a real risk to health, wildlife and our natural environment.

Therefore, if we are to protect our landscape, health and biodiversity, the appropriate management of waste and contaminated land is an environmental imperative. It is also an economic imperative. Many sites that have been contaminated can, if remediated, be opportunity sites. The attractiveness of our natural environment, for example, is a major asset in marketing Northern Ireland as a tourist destination. Furthermore, the risk of infraction proceedings from Europe, which a number of Members mentioned, would be a significant blow to our public finances. Therefore, it is hugely important to have proper regulation and legislation in place.

We recognise that further amendments may be suggested at Committee Stage, but I welcome, in general terms, a number of aspects of the Bill. I welcome the continued emphasis on partnership working between the Department of the Environment and local government and the fact that it is being supported by appropriate legislation. The willingness to explore the lessons that have been learned in England and Wales is also important, but we need to ensure that there are real solutions to Northern Ireland's local problems, particularly those that concern cross-border issues. Those local problems need to be addressed coherently between the two jurisdictions.

Clause 1 provides councils with discretionary powers to levy fixed penalties and to use those funds for clean-up, rather than pursuing prosecutions for some of the less serious offences. That has the potential benefit of offsetting some of the costs of enforcement, which other Members said are a bit of a problem. However, we also recognise and welcome that that power is discretionary. There is, therefore, still the opportunity to prosecute, and there may be instances when it will be required or desirable. In that regard, I concur with Mrs Kelly's comments about the punishment fitting the crime.

I welcome clause 4, which provides the Department, as well as councils, with the power to serve notices on suspected dumpers to clean up. That applies not only to occupiers and owners of land. Most of us will know circumstances in which those who dump illegally do so without the consent or collaboration of the landowner or the land occupier. Therefore, clause 4 may be a more effective deterrent, because it concerns those who are dumping the material. The seizure powers tackle that issue as well. Therefore, those powers are to be welcomed.

Clause 7 has the positive extension of the term "contaminated land" to include "underground strata" and, particularly, waters that are contaminated in the saturated zone. The transfer of material through groundwater transport is difficult to define, because it can be transferred downwards through gravity and upwards through capillary action. I ask the Minister to clarify in his closing remarks whether that definition has been provided to ensure that the Rivers Agency and other sections of the Department of the Environment are clear as to who has responsibility for dealing with particular issues. I

would like clarity on the reasons for the exclusion of water in non-saturated zones, for example, and how that will be monitored and controlled.

In general terms, I welcome the Second Stage of the Bill.

Mr Bell: I welcome the Second Stage of the Bill. I also welcome the new Environment Committee Chairperson to the role. I add my words to the words of tribute that have been paid to the former Chairperson, Mrs Kelly, who had a successful time in the role. We go back to 1997, and we have a unique relationship that dates right back to our days together in Craigavon Borough Council. Although we will cross swords politically, as we are expected to do, I think that she is a formidable political operator, and I pay tribute to the work that she did. We all have only the best interests in seeing employment and learning go forward, and I wish her well in her new role.

For a number of reasons, I thank the Minister of the Environment for tabling the motion today. The success of devolution will always be based on what we can deliver here. If our work here and the legislation that we bring forward means that the men, women and children outside have a better standard of living, we can regard our time as being well spent. The Minister is a party colleague of mine, so one might not be surprised to hear me say that he has applied himself with industry and energy. If we can progress the legislation through to Committee Stage, it will be a success not only for the Minister but for the House and for devolution in Northern Ireland.

The events of Sunday evening and yesterday, when the House stood united against those who want to hold society back and take it away from democracy, show that the success of what the Assembly does in the Chamber is the best riposte to those who seek to take us on more malign paths.

The Bill has two critical aspects; the matter of addressing waste, which the Assembly must do — failure is not an option — and the issue of what to do when land has become contaminated. I strongly welcome the Minister's approach of partnership with local government. I declare my interest as a member of Ards Borough Council, the Committee of the Regions and the Northern Ireland Local Government Association.

Many Members who have already spoken in the debate know that at local government level, councillors get a lot of immediate responses from people on the ground. Knowing that this was coming up today, I took the opportunity to check with my office, and the environment is one of the key issues that comes up when complaints are categorised, whether it be fly-tipping and littering in Killyleagh or the effect that pollution has on birdlife in Comber.

I do not see any other Members for Strangford in the House. If one walks around Strangford Lough from the floodgates in Newtownards, it is clear that we have the privilege of having the most beautiful constituency in Northern Ireland. It is unbelievable. When one looks at that environment and appreciates what we have in nature, which can be followed the whole length of the Ards Peninsula, one can see why we want, at least, to maintain that and, during our time here, to enhance it.

We have to deal with waste. The younger generation is ahead of us on this. I have visited schools throughout Newtownards, such as Londonderry, Abbey and Castle Gardens primary schools, and seen the children's projects and the schools' waste-disposal bins. Children at nursery and primary 1 level come and sort out their waste. That makes me think about people such as those whom the honourable Member for South Antrim Mr Kinahan described earlier, who throw their waste out of the windows of their 4x4 vehicles. That is disgraceful. The younger generation could teach the older generation how to deal with waste properly.

In the course of a conversation, a gentleman asked me why bins in the Ards Borough Council area have to be emptied fortnightly and recycled waste must be separated. He asked why we were doing that to him. He disagreed with it and wanted his bin to be emptied every week: if it was good enough during the old days, it is good enough now. I explained the infraction costs that have come from Europe. It is right; Europe is absolutely right to impose costs on those who damage land wilfully. Penalties should, rightly, be paid.

I remember my old Sunday school teacher at Park Avenue Free Methodist Church, which is not far from here, who taught us that it is our Christian responsibility to be good stewards of the land. Not many people think in those terms.

In many ways, the Bill will go a considerable way towards showing good stewardship of the land.

I want to turn to the issue of what happens when land has been contaminated. It is important that we do not reinvent the wheel. I welcome the Minister's wisdom in looking at best practice elsewhere to see how the Assembly can use it to introduce effective protocols in Northern Ireland and to raise our game to that which exists elsewhere. He has taken an evidence-based approach and has applied that knowledge to improve Northern Ireland's legislation and to bring it up to the standard of best practice. That is to be welcomed warmly.

We cannot deal any further with landfill. The Committee Chairperson pointed out the target, which is to reduce landfill from 50% to 35% of 1995 levels. Failure is not an option on that target. As the Chairperson pointed out, it is not simply a matter of telling people what it will cost us to reach that target, but what the cost will be for them individually and the responsibilities of every person and household. Children in nursery school and primary school are doing it; there is no excuse for laziness on our part and for households not to meet those commitments. We can meet them. The only reason for not meeting them would be lethargy on our part and an inability to discipline ourselves to manage waste in the way that every other country in the European Union is doing already, in many cases at least as well as, if not better than, we are.

12.30 pm

We have to hit the targets. My father used to tell me that it was better to aim at something and miss it than to aim at nothing and hit it. We must meet the targets for the right reasons. To paraphrase John F Kennedy: it is not what this House can do for waste and for you; it is what you can do for waste at council level and in your house. The Assembly will set the lead and put the legislation in place. We want prevention as opposed to a cure. However, there will be a cure in the form of the tariffs that will be applied for breaches of discipline. They must be effective and applied immediately. The Member for East Belfast said that the punishment had to fit the crime, and that is absolutely correct. Notice must be served that discipline for illegal fly-tipping will be applied with the most immediate effect possible.

The Minister is bringing forward a protocol that will clearly state who does what and when they

do it, and there will be lines of responsibility. Local government will strongly welcome the partnership approach that the Minister has adopted. We have a listening Minister who understands the needs of local government because of his background, and I commend the co-operation with local government. It will be a joint effort. If the outcome of that joint effort is a better protocol for dealing with contaminated land and better procedures to tackle fly-tipping, the House will send a collective message to those who damage the environment that their time is up and that we will proceed against them through a legislative framework. We urge prevention, but we will insist on a cure if people continue to damage the land and hand the environment over to our children in a poorer shape than they found it. Such behaviour is unacceptable. The House will declare that that behaviour is unacceptable, and we will pass legislation to prove that it is unacceptable.

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 12.32 pm.

On resuming (Mr Speaker in the Chair) —

2.00 pm

Mr Speaker: I call the Minister of the Environment. Sorry; Mr Beggs will be first to speak.

Mr Beggs: Thank you for that elevation, Mr Speaker. If only that were in your gift.

I declare an interest as a member of Carrickfergus Borough Council. I welcome the Bill's proposals to confer additional powers on local councils to enable them to be more equal partners in the fight against fly-tippers and others who dispose of waste illegally.

Local councils have local officers on the ground, and local councillors can provide additional eyes and ears to help to protect the environment against fly-tippers and illegal waste. I welcome that development. I have come across fly-tipping during my constituency work. There has been fly-tipping at the dams at Lough Mourne, which is a reservoir serving Northern Ireland Water, and at Woodburn. That poses a danger to public health, and anything that will give additional powers to councils and the Department to act against it must be welcomed.

The Minister said that protocols would be developed to make individual bodies' responsibilities clearer, which must also be welcomed. My experience is that questions have been asked on whether the Environment Agency, the councils, Northern Ireland Water or the Forest Service, which owns the land, are responsible for progressing an issue. The legislation places responsibility on a range of bodies, including the landlord and the tenant. That must be welcomed, because where litter gathers as a result of fly-tipping, it has a tendency to collect more and to make matters worse. The Bill will allow prompter action to deal with issues and, I hope, to bring about improvement.

I understand that aspects of the Bill emanate from the 2006 Northern Ireland waste management strategy and earlier consultation on the draft Bill. It was good that we could benefit from the experience of legislation in England and Wales. I support the general principles of the Bill.

The idea of fixed penalty notices must also be welcomed. That allows speedier action to address the issue at an earlier stage. It allows the potential for action to be taken that would avoid significant legal cost, which is sometimes an impairment to bringing about improvement.

The Department and, on occasions, the councils can be reticent about taking legal action because of the thousands of pounds that are often involved. If the introduction of fixed penalty notices can provide a speedy method to deal with lower-level aspects of waste and litter, it must be welcomed.

The Bill includes provision for the Department's officers to be able to seize property where it can be shown that its operation is associated with the illegal dumping of waste. Particularly in border areas, organised crime has become involved in dumping waste products because of the significant profits that can be made from it. Indeed, there is a difficulty with fuel laundering in that materials are left behind that can contaminate the countryside.

The ability to seize vehicles will result in a significant financial penalty for those who are involved in illegal activity, and, perhaps even more importantly, it will disrupt their operations. I, therefore, support the general principle of that power.

The Bill proposes to create a mechanism whereby heavy equipment, with appropriate approval, can enter land to investigate any suspicions of illegal dumping. If there is any evidence of such activity in a residential property, those premises can be entered if necessary, provided that there is due reason to investigate. If that enables the authorities to gather information that helps to stop the illegal dumping of waste, it must also be welcomed. An appropriate balance must be struck, and to ensure that innocent householders are protected, reasonable suspicion must exist before the authorities enter property.

The Bill also deals with the issue of underground water strata. That is an important area, given that it is not just surface rivers that must be protected. Pollution that enters water flows in the lower strata and is likely to surface again at some point, so it is important that we protect all aspects of our natural environment. Who knows where the water in the underground strata comes out again? Does it enter reservoirs? Does it affect fish life? Are members of the public catching fish and subsequently being endangered by that polluted water? It is, therefore, important that all aspects of water protection be in place.

The Bill mentions the Producer Responsibility Obligations (Northern Ireland) Order 1998. It is important that producers who are involved in

manufacturing or processing give appropriate recognition to the need for minimising waste production and that they take appropriate care in doing so. It may be right and proper for the authorities to seek further information and assurances on whether appropriate protection is being given in such processes.

It is appropriate that the Department has the ability to investigate. However, it is also important that it does not come down on local manufacturers and producers with a heavy sledge, especially in initial contacts. Instead, the Department should talk to them and, as a result, all right-minded, responsible employers will, hopefully, bring about any required improvements. However, if the Department is not getting the appropriate response, it should be able to take much more stringent and severe action. It is important that we take the public and companies along with us and that we do not create a barrier to improving the environment. Initially, a co-operative route should be taken so that processors move forward constructively, rather than simply impede improvements. If significant legal action occurs at a very early stage, jobs will be put at risk. However, the Department should come down with significant force if that is necessary.

Other Members mentioned the important issue of finance. I note that the Bill talks about giving discretionary powers to councils. I welcome the fact that councils will have the ability to retain receipts of penalty notices, thereby enabling them to recoup some of the costs that will undoubtedly occur. Any legal action that councils take can frequently cost tens of thousands of pounds. Therefore, when scrutinising the Bill, we will have to investigate what happens elsewhere to see whether councils have the significant scale and mass to enable them to take significant court action in the current 26-council format or whether other mechanisms will have to be put in place to enable them to take such action when appropriate.

Mention was made by other Members of the landfill tax. Perhaps that should be pursued to see whether some form of proportionate funding may be available to enable appropriate legal action to be taken so that offenders are dealt with when necessary.

In general, I support the principles of the Bill and think that it is an improvement on what we have. It should enable us to better protect

our environment, to keep our countryside in pristine condition and to value the countryside. Tourism is becoming increasingly important and, therefore, it is important that we, as an Assembly, do all that we can to protect the environment so that it can be enjoyed by us, our children, our children's children, and visitors who come to Northern Ireland.

The Minister of the Environment: I thank Members for the points that they raised in what was an interesting and instructive debate. I will deal with some of those issues, beginning with the progress on the single waste authority. I remain committed to the future creation of a single waste authority. I have asked officials to prepare a business case to quantify the likely benefits of a single waste authority and hence confirm whether it would be beneficial to Northern Ireland. I am hopeful that that work will be completed within the next few months. As I did not want to delay the progress of the Bill, I decided to seek to have provision for that placed in other legislation at a later point. However, there are opportunities, around scale, procurement, the sale of recyclables, and so forth, to make real savings that can be passed on to the general public. I am still of the opinion that a single waste authority can deliver the administration of waste management in a way that is more cost effective for the general public.

At present, we are not in a position to determine whether additional resources are required for councils to deal with these issues, because there is virtually no data on the scale and geographic spread of fly-tipping in Northern Ireland. Therefore, the Department is seeking to establish quality data collection so that we can quantify what the costs may be. If the data inform us that a considerable cost burden will be applied to councils, we will be in a position to bid for money to deal with that. However, at this time, such data are not available and, therefore, we are not in a position to make that bid.

Local government involvement in the development of fly-tipping proposals was raised. Over recent years, there has been considerable discussion and consultation between my Department and local government. When the Waste (Amendment) (Northern Ireland) Order 2007 was brought through, local government pressed for further legislation. We will work, as we have been, with all 26 councils, the three waste management groups and NILGA. We intend to engage further

with local authorities, particularly on the development of a fly-tipping protocol.

Officials from my Department and representatives from local government have been involved in discussions on the development of a fly-tipping protocol to set out their respective responsibilities in relation to illegally deposited waste. Discussions are centred on data collection. Accurate statistics are required on the quantity and geographic spread of fly-tipping in Northern Ireland to assess the scale of the problem, to establish a baseline on the number and volume of incidents and to allow for the assessment of the financial implications of tackling illegal waste disposal. Additionally, when the protocol is in place, an appropriate monitoring system will allow for an assessment of the effectiveness of changes in the legislation.

The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency is assisting us in determining the statistical information that is required for the development of such a protocol. We anticipate that work on the fly-tipping protocol will be taken forward in parallel with the legislative process and that it will be put in place prior to the commencement of legislative changes.

We were asked again about cross-border waste issues. We are working with the Republic of Ireland Government to repatriate waste from the Republic of Ireland that was dumped in Northern Ireland. That work is ongoing, and I have provided the Assembly with detail of it.

2.15 pm

Waste management starts with waste prevention. We recently launched a new website, www.rethinkwasteni.org. It is imperative that we all take our waste responsibilities seriously. I have been out on clean-up campaigns, and the amount of waste thrown away by people is unbelievable. Recently, I highlighted the cost of that to each and every one of us. It costs approximately £100,000 a day to clean up after everybody who throws down their waste. A lot of people do not throw down waste, so that huge cost arises as a result of the poor practices of a small number of individuals.

We need to change the culture in Northern Ireland dramatically so that it is similar to the culture that exists in northern Europe where people put their waste in the nearest available receptacle instead of throwing it on the ground.

If there is no receptacle available, people take their waste home with them and deposit it in the appropriate recycling or waste facility, but they do not throw it on the ground.

We have also developed the website www.lovefoodhatewaste.com, which will help us to explain to members of the public how they can better use food to avoid waste, which is expensive at both an individual and an environmental level, because a lot of methane and leachate is produced by food waste that ends up in landfill sites.

We have a 50% household recycling target and a 70% recycling target for construction and demolition waste. We have made considerable progress in meeting those targets; the rate of household recycling is 34%, and the rate for the recycling of construction, demolition and excavation waste is estimated to be 33%. I have said before that I am not sure that 50% is the right target for household waste. I will be working with the current waste management bodies to see whether we can raise that target further, because it could be cost-effective to recycle a greater amount of material than 50%. That is particularly important given that Northern Ireland is scheduled to spend around £600 million on energy recovery from waste. Is it an absolute necessity to spend that amount of money on capital infrastructure if we can increase the recycling targets?

I am also very interested in a lot of the new developments in the potential for recovering energy and other things from waste. For example, I recently learned of a process called acid hydrolysis, which can be particularly effective in drawing cellulose from materials. That can produce chemicals of high value at the end of the cycle. Therefore, instead of putting waste into anaerobic digestion or incineration, there is the potential to achieve something from waste that is of high value. Those are the sorts of technologies that we need to look at, address and grasp, and I will press for them.

In order to boost recycling activity, the Department is working with the Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP). We have enabled WRAP to work closely and successfully with district councils. We have also invested funding in pioneering technology to recycle and compost 60,000 tons of biowaste, such as garden clippings and food waste, per annum. Such moves can contribute greatly to reducing the

amount of waste that ends up in landfill sites, which are the last resort for waste.

Mr F McCann: I agree with the Minister that there needs to be a complete change in our attitude to waste disposal and to the illegal dumping of waste in cities and in the countryside. Does he agree that the packaging that accompanies most items that we buy is one of the main problems?

The Minister of the Environment: I have taken that matter up with the British Retail Consortium, which represents large shops, particularly the multinationals. Furthermore, I raised the issue with local companies such as the Musgrave Group. There has been much talk about a plastic bag levy, which was introduced in the Republic of Ireland. Plastic bags account for about 0.3% of waste. A plastic bag levy could be high profile and beneficial. However, we have reduced the number of plastic bags that are used in Northern Ireland by close to 50%.

As the Member said, far greater benefit can be derived from reducing packaging. Cadbury recently packaged Easter eggs in foil only. I remember that, on the odd occasion on which I received an Easter egg as a child, it came in a huge box. When the packaging was stripped away, the egg itself was not that big. *[Laughter.]* We need to remove that type of packaging, particularly from children's toys, which contain glam wrapping, such as cardboard and hard plastic that one can hardly cut off. That is done to present the product as much better than it really is. Therefore, packaging is certainly a target area.

We must also target the thugs who launder fuel and leave the deposits beside rivers or roads. Newry and Mourne District Council has told me about the extent of the problem that it faces and the cost to ratepayers in the area. In the past three or four years, it has cost around £250,000 to clean up after the criminals who have engaged in such activity and after the people who fly-tip even though it is not necessary to do so.

Mr Molloy: Will the Minister give way?

The Minister of the Environment: I will give way in a minute.

For example, given that most councils offer a service to take settees away free of charge, why do people deposit them at the sides of roads? It

is not logical, and it causes huge damage to our environment.

Mr Molloy: I thank the Minister for giving way.

At our council meeting last night, we discussed whether to ban cat litter or, at least, to place a categorisation on it to ensure that its sale is regulated and records kept of where it is sold. That material is often dumped on farmers' land, and it is unfair that the responsibility falls on them, or on local councils, to dispose of it at ratepayers' expense. Therefore, is there a means of regulating cat litter and other materials that are used in fuel laundering to try to control that situation?

The Minister of the Environment: I have spoken to Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs about that issue, and it indicated that it is difficult to take such an approach. There must be some form of regulation of that material. Although cat litter is not the only material that is used to launder fuel, it is used regularly for that purpose. There are some steps that we could take to tackle that.

Dolores Kelly said that fines must be a real deterrent. I agree, and I am happy to discuss how to approach that issue with the new Justice Minister, Mr Ford, in due course.

Mr Kinahan raised the problem of people throwing items from their vehicles. He said that he had followed a 4x4 that deposited materials. I hope that he took the registration number of that vehicle and reported it to the police. We should all report individuals who throw waste out of their vehicles. If we do so, it will happen less frequently. If Mr Kinahan were to pass that information on to the responsible local authority, I have no doubt that, having such a fine and upright witness to go to court with, it would pursue the matter.

It is right that discretionary powers are available. Fixed-penalty notices can be applied, but when a fixed penalty is not tough enough, individuals can be taken to court, where the issue can be pressed somewhat harder.

Mr Bell spoke at length about Strangford. Mr Shannon will be glad to know that Strangford was not missed. Mr Bell said that so much more could be done by the Assembly and by local authorities to make Northern Ireland a better and cleaner place. I am aware that people who come to Northern Ireland express

surprise that it is not as clean as it should be. Tourism provides us with a huge opportunity to benefit our economy. If we are serious about bringing more tourists to Northern Ireland, we must keep it in pristine condition. However, allowing local authorities to spend £35 million a year of the public's money is not the best way to do that. It would be better if people were to change their culture to one of keeping Northern Ireland tidy and in a condition that we would be proud to show to other people. Who would invite someone to their home if it was in a state — to use a good Ulster-Scots word — of through-otherness? We are talking about bringing tourists to Northern Ireland. There is an opportunity to do something about that.

I am going to be proactive in this Assembly about doing that, and I believe that I have the support of the House and of local authorities. We need to change people's mindsets. Together, we can all move forward. I trust that Members will support the Bill.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Second Stage of the Waste and Contaminated Land (Amendment) Bill [NIA 10/09] be agreed.

Horse Racing (Charges on Bookmakers) Order (Northern Ireland) 2010

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew): I beg to move

That the Horse Racing (Charges on Bookmakers) Order (Northern Ireland) 2010 be affirmed.

I wish to outline to Members the background to the Horse Racing (Charges on Bookmakers) Order (NI) 2010 and the reasons for introducing it to the Assembly. The horse racing fund, which is administered by my Department, provides financial support for our two racecourses at Downpatrick and Down Royal, as laid down in the Horse Racing (NI) Order 1990. That Order requires a person who intends to apply for a bookmaker's licence or a bookmaking office licence to make an annual contribution to the fund as determined by my Department.

There are currently 339 off-course and 131 on-course bookmakers in the North of Ireland. The off-course bookmakers are licensed offices, while the on-course bookies are licensed to operate on the racecourses. The racecourses' representatives entered into direct negotiations with the bookmakers to consider an appropriate increase in their contributions to the horse racing fund. The result of those negotiations is an agreement between the racecourses and the bookmakers to increase the horse racing fund levy from £1,123 to £2,000 per annum for a five-year period. The negotiations were also prompted, in part, by the impact of the credit crunch, resulting in dwindling private sector sponsorship and reduced prize money funding from other sources at both racecourses.

In August 2009, I agreed to a consultation exercise on the proposed increase. That consultation has been completed and although the response was limited, the majority of stakeholders were in favour of the increase. The small number of responses, and the fact that only two respondents were against the proposal, suggests that the industry is generally content.

Both racecourses in the North of Ireland have submitted budgets that confirm how the additional funding should be spent.

Down Royal intends to increase race day support in the form of security and technical funding that will comprise CCTV, ambulances, veterinary services, and so forth. Downpatrick intends to achieve capital investment of £585,000 for

items such as ancillary accommodation and refurbishment of the entrance area.

2.30 pm

The arrangement is to last for a five-year period only, after which the levy will revert to £1,123 a year. The on-course bookmakers' levy will remain at £99 a year, but will be subject to consideration after the five-year period. No human rights or equality issues arise from the Order, and other than the increase in levy, there are no further financial implications. Primary legislation is in place, and this secondary legislation, subject to affirmative resolution, is required to implement any increase in the horse racing fund. I commend the Horse Racing (Charges on Bookmakers) Order (NI) 2010 to the Assembly. Go raibh milé maith agat.

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

I welcome the opportunity to contribute to the debate. The motion seeks to affirm the Horse Racing (Charges on Bookmakers) Order (Northern Ireland) 2010. The statutory rule will revoke the Horse Racing (Charges on Bookmakers) Order (Northern Ireland) 2007. The Order will significantly increase the off-course bookmakers' levy paid to the horse racing fund in Northern Ireland. That levy consists of charges paid to the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development by persons who intend to apply for bookmakers' and bookmaking office licences.

The agreement to increase the levy followed negotiations between racecourses and bookmakers and raises the levy from £1,123 per annum to £2,000 per annum for a five-year period. On 16 February 2010, the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development considered the proposal as an SL1 and indicated that it was content with the policy merits of the proposal. The Committee further considered the statutory rule on 16 March 2010 and resolved that it be affirmed.

As a Member, I am keen that the additional finance should be used in the proper mechanisms and ways that are laid out in the Order. Otherwise it could be diverted to other areas that may not be appropriate. It will be interesting to see whether the levy reverts to the original cost after the five-year period, although many of us may not be here for that. However, that is for the future, and the five-year period is built into the legislation.

My key focus is that the Order has been agreed by the stakeholders concerned. It is not often that a piece of legislation to increase charges comes before us having been so easily agreed by stakeholders.

Mr McCarthy: I am not a member of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development or an avid bookmakers' customer, so I have little to say about the motion. However, in common with my colleague Mr Elliott, I am surprised that there has not been more opposition and that only two people objected to the Minister's advocating a rise in the levy from £1,123 to £2,000.

We should congratulate Tony McCoy on his excellent Grand National win in the past week. It was not long ago that the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure held a reception for Tony to celebrate his earlier successes. Once again, well done to him, and I am sure that everyone will agree with that.

Mr P Ramsey: I am aware of the bookmaking levy to which Tom Elliott referred. In Britain, for example, that money is distributed in capital and revenue terms to horse racing and greyhound racing. However, in Northern Ireland, there is a difficulty whereby that money is not being distributed in capital or revenue at, for example, Ballyskeagh or the Brandywell track in Derry. Will the Minister explain that disparity in the redistribution of the bookmakers' levy?

Mr McCarthy: I thank the Member. I know nothing about horse racing and even less about greyhound racing, but I am sure that the Minister will respond to that question.

There is nothing further to say other than —

Mr Elliott: I will clarify for the Member: horses take part in horse racing, and dogs take part in greyhound racing.

Mr McCarthy: Thanks very much, although I did know that.

Given what the Minister said and the lack of opposition to her proposals, I have nothing further to say on the matter.

Mr W Clarke: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I welcome the legislation and appreciate the opportunity to say a few words. The policy will improve access to, and facilities at, both our racecourses in the North, namely Down Royal and Downpatrick. It is essential

to the racecourses' viability. As the Minister probably said — I missed her contribution — proceeds go towards the general running of the sport, such as the cost of prize money and ensuring the safety of spectators and the proper conduct of racing. As the Member who spoke previously said, the increase was agreed after consultation. Both parties have reached agreement on how to move forward.

The racing industry supports many sectors, such as trainers, vets and transport, and it provides jobs throughout the island of Ireland and generates tax revenue. Horse racing is stitched into the fabric of the Irish rural economy, and it employs people in every county. All jobs need to be supported in the current economic climate, especially when they are spread across the country and located in rural areas. The Irish horse racing industry supports thousands of jobs. The stability of those jobs and the associated economic activity depends on the long-term security of funding for the industry.

From my experience in South Down, I am aware of the potential for the promotion of tourism at Downpatrick racecourse, which I probably visit most.

Mr Molloy: Do you get many winners?

Mr W Clarke: I do not get too many winners, but I visit anyway.

Mr Shannon: Did you win on Saturday?

Mr W Clarke: Yes; I won a sweepstake. I declare an interest in that regard.

I have worked with the racecourse to develop the district's potential as regards businesses' income, and so on. The racing industry brings many spin-offs to local businesses, including bed and breakfasts, public houses, restaurants and taxi firms. The benefits are across the board. We need to invest in our racecourses, particularly in the current economic climate. Racecourses are a gateway to districts, as tourists will come back repeatedly to sample the delights that are on offer throughout the island of Ireland.

I do not want to go into the history of Downpatrick racecourse too much, but it has been in existence for more than 300 years. Therefore, the communities of Downpatrick and South Down generally have a sense of it belonging to them. Anything that can build on that has to be

welcomed, and the extra resources will have the viability of the racecourse at heart.

I will not prolong the debate other than to say that I support the motion.

Mr McDevitt: I apologise to you, Mr Speaker, to my colleagues in the House and to the Minister for being late; I was delayed. I thank the Minister for getting the proposals to the House eventually. She will know that, in a previous life, I spent several years advocating the change. I suppose that I should make a partial declaration in that regard.

For many of us, the horse racing industry in the North and across the island is a sport that we enjoy and that can make us laugh and make us cry. However, it is also a business and a very important part of the agriculture sector and industry. That business does not happen without stimulus, support and a considerable amount of government intervention.

The lesson of the past 20 years in the Republic is that a combination of fiscal stimulus and direct government investment has transformed the thoroughbred and horse racing industry from a great sport into a very significant business and contributor to the rural economies of the Twenty-six Counties.

We have never really maximised the horse racing industry's potential in the North, and that has been largely because, down through the years, old Stormont Governments and direct rule Ministers never sought to prioritise it or to give it the incentive and stimulus that it needed in order to succeed.

I appreciate the efforts that the Minister has made. I know that she has a deep personal commitment to try to change the industry here, and I welcome that. This legislation is an important step along the way. However, we need to do much more. We need to look at opportunities in thoroughbred breeding, development of the equine industry and the celebration of success through having world-class racecourses and the sort of infrastructure that is needed to attract the best horses to race in the region. That is kind of present in Down Royal racecourse. The investment made there over the past 15 or 20 years has allowed an infrastructure to be put in place that means that the racecourse hosts not one but two grade 1 races every year. Those are the Formula One races of the National Hunt calendar: the sort of place where one will

see a Cheltenham Gold Cup or Grand National winner. We need such racecourses if we ever hope to be on the world stage of horse racing. Those racecourses — those windows to the industry — allow the industry to grow and to be celebrated. It is the industry that gives rise to the Ballyhollands of this world — the horses that get to the very last fence of the Grand National only to find that they have run out of steam.

We must look at the policy slightly more strategically. We must consider it at a regional level and understand that horse racing on this island is an all-island affair. It is administered as an all-island industry, and has ever been so; it is regulated on the same basis, and has ever been so. It should receive investment, with the support of this House and the Oireachtas, on an all-island basis. In these Northern six counties, we have the potential, the love and the energy — in our jockeys, in our trainers and in those studs that still survive despite the little support available to them — to make horse racing and the thoroughbred industry something of which we can all feel proud. That has been proven. I am happy to support this small step forward.

Mr Shannon: I support the motion. I confess that I know very little about horses; I know only that King Billy rode one at the Battle of the Boyne.

For the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development, on which I sit, it is important that it has been involved in the horse racing industry. If only all legislation before the House were as simple as this, it would be great. Legislation would be passed in the House regularly.

I am a representative of Strangford. It would be terrible if I were not to mention that at least once a day in the Chamber. However, in the constituency that I represent, there is a clear interest in horses. The industry is important to a great many people, such as those in the Ulster Rural Riders' Association and those directly involved in horse racing, which is what the debate is all about. It is also important for the economy, as it puts money back into it. Willie Clarke, Conall and other Members mentioned that fees are ploughed back into the industry. Those fees help the horses, improve the industry and pay for the introduction of apprentices into it. That is good news.

I am sure you will be glad to hear that my speech will be short, Mr Speaker. This legislation has come about through negotiation with the stakeholders, and that is important. It could not

have happened without their agreement. I wish all legislation was as easily dealt with. There is much legislation, Minister, on which we will not agree, but let us hope that we can agree as easily on other matters in future.

Mr Savage: I support the motion. The Order increases the charges payable by persons applying for bookmaking office licences for off-course bookmakers to the horse racing fund administered by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development.

That is an above-inflation increase of approximately £900 on the amount paid by all bookmakers into the horse racing fund. The rise will, however, ultimately result in increased investment in Northern Ireland's two racecourses — Downpatrick and Down Royal.

2.45 pm

The wider equine and tourist industries in Northern Ireland are expected to benefit indirectly from the increase in funding to racecourses. The Order provides guaranteed investment from the horse racing fund until 31 December 2014. We must ensure that the Department properly manages and administers that funding to ensure quality investment in racecourses for the future.

We saw what happened to the horse racing industry in Northern Ireland during the Easter recess and the money that the horse racing fraternity generated. One has only to look at the breeding facilities of the horse racing world in Northern Ireland. The benefits and potential of a winner for any stud farm are unbelievable. That is another side of farming in which many people have an expertise. That expertise has to be nurtured, just as in any other aspect of farming. I hope that we on the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development can play our part to encourage and to bring home to the wider fraternity the benefits of the horse racing industry in Northern Ireland.

I am not a fan of racing, but I like to see good horse racing. I hope that the part that the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development has played in that will encourage farmers to expand their businesses here and create employment.

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I am grateful to the Members who

spoke, and I am pleased to note broad support for the provisions in the Order. There was a great deal of consensus, so I will not go into all the issues or attribute comments to different Members.

However, I will, as Kieran McCarthy reminded me, send congratulations to A P McCoy — or Tony, as he is better known — for his success on Saturday. Unfortunately, I did not get time to get to the bookies to put a wee bet on, so I missed out. However, a few around here probably lost money on Saturday, and that is why there is no difficulty with raising the levy, because the bookies are good at taking money off all of us.

The Order has very much been the result of a partnership approach, and that is why there had been so little resistance to it. As Jim Shannon said, we sat down, worked with the industry, and got a consensus, and that is why there has been very little resistance.

Pat Ramsey spoke about capital investment. The levy is for the horse racing fund and, therefore, for horse racing courses. That was discussed between the bookies and the horse racing courses. It is not that there cannot be capital investment, because it is happening in Downpatrick, but it is a question of what racecourses need at present. The increase is for a limited five-year period, as Tom Elliott, the Deputy Chairperson of the Agriculture Committee, pointed out. The statutory rule increases the levy to £2,000 for five years, but reverts after that.

A number of Members spoke about economic opportunities, and I agree with a lot of what was said about that. Conall McDevitt and Willie Clarke, among others, talked about horse racing being an all-Ireland sport. My first lobby on the issue was, I suppose, by the country GP who delivered me, and who took the opportunity one day to bend my ear about horse racing, in which he has a keen interest. I was on the Committee for Social Development when Sunday racing was being discussed. Since then, I have had an interest to do what I can to support the industry. Horse racing is very much an all-Ireland sport, and there is great potential and opportunities for the North if we can tap into them. In a tribute to Fitz Gillespie, therefore, I am delighted to bring forward this Order and further resources to horse racing courses so that they can step up what they do.

Members are right to say that going to the races is a great day out. At the races, I have seen Cheltenham Gold Cup winners and other horses that are normally seen on TV. It does not cost much to go and to have a wee flutter. It is a great day out and is very enjoyable. The more that people participate in racing, the more spin-offs there will be for the broader economy — for bed and breakfasts and other businesses in and around the area. Members spoke about that aspect.

As George and other Members mentioned, there is also a spin-off for jobs potential. Our College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise runs a number of courses at its Enniskillen campus, including courses for farriers, blacksmiths, jockeys and trainers. Many students at Enniskillen cut their teeth at point-to-points and other races before moving on to the next level.

People visit Ireland for the horse racing. They do not come here for the weather, so we have to find something else for them to do. In horse racing, we have an advantage over some of our competitors, and we can attract people to our racecourses to participate in the sport. There are wider benefits, and it is important that we see those spin-offs and that we continue to work together for the best interests of our industry and for the economy as a whole.

Mr McCarthy: I appreciate the Minister's comments about the economy, and so forth. Does she acknowledge that horse racing is an expensive sport, particularly for young people? Will her Department offer any grant aid to get people into the sport in the first place?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: No; not at this stage. Having answered the Member's question in one word, I will not stand here and waffle for five minutes. We cannot offer any grant aid in the present economic climate, and we do not know when there will be the opportunity to do so. Undoubtedly, horse racing is an expensive sport to get into, but there are rewards. The horse racing industry is very vocational. If a mare is foaling, our students at Enniskillen will sit up with her all night, and they really go above and beyond. It is a labour of love, and many horsey people recognise that. At times, there are no financial benefits, but it is something that they love and are absolutely passionate about. If we can do anything to encourage them to stay in the sport, to give them opportunities and, as I

said earlier, to increase the prize money fund, that is a benefit.

I am delighted to have been able to bring this statutory rule to the Floor today, and I am delighted that it received consensus across the House. I look forward to seeing Members at the races some day.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Horse Racing (Charges on Bookmakers) Order (Northern Ireland) 2010 be affirmed.

Committee Business

Membership of Statutory Committees

Mr Speaker: As the motion is a business motion, there will be no opportunity for debate. Members should by now have received the document NIA 51/09/10R, which sets out the detail of the membership of the Statutory Committees and is referred to in the motion.

Resolved:

That, in accordance with Standing Order 49(3), the membership of the Statutory Committees as detailed in NIA 51/09/10R be approved. — [Lord Morrow.]

The membership of the Statutory Committees as detailed in NIA 51/09/10R is as follows:

Committee for Agriculture and Rural

Development: Mr Ian Paisley Junior (Chairperson); Mr Tom Elliott (Deputy Chairperson); Mr PJ Bradley; Mr Willie Clarke; Mr Pat Doherty; Mr William Irwin; Mr Kieran McCarthy; Dr William McCrea; Mr Francie Molloy; Mr George Savage; Mr Jim Shannon.

Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure:

Mr Barry McElduff (Chairperson); Mr Declan O'Loan (Deputy Chairperson); Mr PJ Bradley; Lord Browne; Mr Trevor Clarke; Mr Billy Leonard; Mr Kieran McCarthy; Mr Raymond McCartney; Mr David McClarty; Miss Michelle McIlveen; Mr Ken Robinson.

Committee for Education: Mr Mervyn Storey (Chairperson); Mr David Hilditch (Deputy Chairperson); Mr Dominic Bradley; Mrs Mary Bradley; Mr Trevor Lunn; Mr John McCallister; Mr Basil McCrea; Miss Michelle McIlveen; Mr John O'Dowd; Mrs Michelle O'Neill; Mr Alastair Ross.

Committee for Employment and Learning:

Mrs Dolores Kelly (Chairperson); Mr Peter Weir (Deputy Chairperson); Mr Paul Butler; Mr Trevor Clarke; Rev Dr Robert Coulter; Mr William Irwin; Ms Anna Lo; Mr David McClarty; Mrs Claire McGill; Mr Pat Ramsey; Ms Sue Ramsey.

Committee for Enterprise, Trade and

Investment: Mr Alban Maginness (Chairperson); Mr Paul Butler (Deputy Chairperson); Mr Gregory Campbell; Mr Leslie Cree; Ms Jennifer McCann; Dr Alasdair McDonnell; Mr Gerry McHugh; Mr Daithi McKay; Mr Stephen Moutray; Mr Sean Neeson; Mr David Simpson.

Committee for the Environment: Mr Cathal Boylan (Chairperson); Mr Dominic Bradley (Deputy Chairperson); Mr Roy Beggs; Mr Jonathan Bell; Mr John Dallat; Mr Danny Kinahan; Mr Ian McCrea; Mr Daithi McKay; Mr Alastair Ross; Mr Peter Weir; Mr Brian Wilson.

Committee for Finance and Personnel: Ms Jennifer McCann (Chairperson); Mr David McNarry (Deputy Chairperson); Mr Jonathan Craig; Dr Stephen Farry; Mr Simon Hamilton; Mr Fra McCann; Mr Mitchel McLaughlin; Mr Adrian McQuillan; Mr Declan O'Loan; Mr Ian Paisley Junior; Ms Dawn Purvis.

Committee for Health, Social Services and

Public Safety: Mr Jim Wells (Chairperson); Mrs Michelle O'Neill (Deputy Chairperson); Mr Tom Buchanan; Dr Kieran Deeney; Mr Alex Easton; Mr Sam Gardiner; Mrs Dolores Kelly; Mr John McCallister; Mr Conall McDevitt; Mrs Claire McGill; Ms Sue Ramsey.

Committee for Justice: Lord Morrow (Chairperson); Mr Raymond McCartney (Deputy Chairperson); Mr Jonathan Bell; Rt Hon Jeffrey Donaldson; Mr Tom Elliott; Mrs Dolores Kelly; Mr Alban Maginness; Mr David McNarry; Ms Carál Ní Chuilín; Mr John O'Dowd; Mr Alastair Ross.

Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: Mr Danny Kennedy (Chairperson); Mrs Naomi Long (Deputy Chairperson); Ms Martina Anderson; Mr Alex Attwood; Mr Tom Elliott; Mr Barry McElduff; Mr Francie Molloy; Mr Stephen Moutray; Mr Jim Shannon; Mr Jimmy Spratt; Mr George Robinson.

Committee for Regional Development: Mr Fred Cobain (Chairperson); Miss Michelle McIlveen (Deputy Chairperson); Mr Cathal Boylan; Mr Allan Bresland; Mr Willie Clarke; Mr Tommy Gallagher; Mr Danny Kinahan; Mr Billy Leonard; Mr Trevor Lunn; Mr Ian McCrea; Mr George Robinson.

Committee for Social Development: Mr Simon Hamilton (Chairperson); Ms Carál Ní Chuilín (Deputy Chairperson); Mr Billy Armstrong; Mrs Mary Bradley; Mr Mickey Brady; Mr Thomas Burns; Mr Jonathan Craig; Mr Alex Easton; Mr David Hilditch; Ms Anna Lo; Mr Fra McCann.

Mr Speaker: I ask the House to take its ease until we move to Question Time at 3.00 pm.

3.00 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Finance and Personnel

Economic Development

1. **Mr McNarry** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether he will convene an all-party economic conference to garner ideas on economic development, in light of his comments at a recent investment conference in Dundalk that the Executive had not done enough to advance long-term economic growth and that there had not been any significant change to policy focus on economic growth over the last few years. (AQO 1033/10)

8. **Mr Cree** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, in light of his comments at the recent investment conference in Dundalk, what action he is planning, including any financial stimulus package, to generate enduring and tangible economic returns in areas such as research and development and innovation, mathematics and technology skills, physical infrastructure, and the lessening of regulatory burdens. (AQO 1040/10)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr S Wilson): With your permission, Mr Speaker, I will answer questions 1 and 8 together.

In my speech in Dundalk, I highlighted the need to promote capital investment in those sectors that offer the greatest potential for exploiting economic growth. Members will be well aware that, first, we in Northern Ireland have a high dependence upon the public sector; and, secondly, productivity levels in the private sector are much lower than those in other parts of the United Kingdom. Of course, that impacts on the kinds of jobs that we have and the level of remuneration available in those jobs, and on economic growth.

Some sectors that immediately come to mind are physical infrastructure, such as roads, telecommunications, transport hubs, energy, etc; investment in subjects such as science, technology, engineering and mathematics; and workforce training that would help to generate additional productivity. That agenda is entirely consistent with the recommendations in the

recent 'Independent Review of Economic Policy' report.

One other issue raised by Mr Cree in his question is what I am doing, as Finance Minister, to take forward the economic growth agenda in Northern Ireland. He will be well aware that I cannot act unilaterally. The action is a collective one by all Departments, but I have been seeking to at least promote with Executive colleagues the theme that, I hope, will be central to the discussion of the spending review for the Programme for Government and the Budget for the forthcoming year. We should emphasise that if we are genuine about making economic growth and productivity the number-one priority, the Executive will have some difficult decisions to make.

Mr McNarry: By making observations across the border rather than to the Assembly on what he says is the failure of our Executive to foster long-term economic growth, was the Minister evading his primary duty to report to this House on those matters? Will he also explain the apparent and glaring contradiction between his own failure to support the lowering of corporation tax and his rejection of the Economic Reform Group for advocating it, as set out in his letter to the Finance Committee on 23 March? Compare that with the First Minister's comments, widely reported on 9 April, that his party would strongly support a reduction in corporation tax.

Mr Speaker: Order. Question Time is about asking questions, not making statements. I ask the Member to come to his question.

Mr McNarry: I will not disagree with you, but I think that if you read the Hansard report, Mr Speaker, you will find that there was a question in there. However, I will, finally, come to what you have asked me to do. As the subject matter is economic growth, will the Minister give Members his assessment of how he intends to distribute the £33 million that will come from Mr Darling's last ever Budget?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: First, the Member has this great tendency never to listen to what is being said in the House. If he does listen and hear, he sometimes fails to understand. I have said in this House on many occasions, and it was the theme to my speech in Dundalk — which was attended by just as many people from Northern Ireland as from the Irish Republic; an example of the type of

good economic co-operation that his party has supported in the past — that the emphasis is on the need for us to find ways to promote economic growth and to meet the objective set out as the first priority in the Programme for Government.

The Member raised the issue of corporation tax. As he seems to have taken a great interest in the speech that I made in Dundalk, he will have noted that I said that the Executive have been good at dealing with the demand side of the economy by reducing business rates, not imposing water charges and capping taxes on the manufacturing industry. However, anyone who understands the supply side knows that, if we are to achieve economic growth, we must change the very nature of the infrastructure and build up the skills of the workforce in Northern Ireland. That was the point that I emphasised.

There is room to alleviate costs by reducing tax levels or holding them at a certain level. However, if we are fundamentally to change the nature of the economy, we must examine the infrastructure, skills base, and so forth. Mr Farry has raised that issue with me on a number of occasions, and he and I see eye to eye on many such issues.

Mr McNarry never does his homework. Had he done so, he would know that there is not £33 million available to the Executive under the Barnett formula. Some £21 million or £23 million of that amount is annually managed expenditure (AME), which will be available only on demand as a result of benefit changes, and so forth. I think that £12 million is available to the Executive under the Barnett formula for the departmental expenditure limits, and that will be decided by discussion in the Executive.

Mr McNarry: What about corporation tax? Will you not go there?

Mr Cree: I thank the Minister for his response, and I share many of the sentiments that he expressed. Will he cite examples of where he has facilitated additional finance to the relevant Departments to achieve the objectives to which he referred at Dundalk?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The roads infrastructure and the Department for Employment and Learning will benefit from the Budget settlement for this year. Indeed, the requests for finance in those areas have been made available to the Department for

Employment and Learning and the Department for Regional Development. When budgets are allocated to Ministers, it is up to them to deal with exactly how they spend each of those budget lines.

Mr Shannon: I thank the Minister for his response. What will he do to take forward the financial stimulus? I hope that any action will be immediate. Perhaps he will outline to the Assembly exactly what he will do in that regard.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: We have had a long debate on the Budget for this year, and it has now been allocated to the Departments. I hope that there will be no interruptions to those spending plans after the election, but we cannot guarantee that. In future months, the danger is that, rather than a financial stimulus, we may face a financial reduction because of budgetary decisions taken in England.

There has been some chirping about my not addressing Mr McNarry's earlier point about corporation tax, so I will indulge him for a moment. The Member gets exercised about black holes in the economy, and he knows full well that it has been made clear that a reduction in corporation tax would result in a notional sum — anything between £200 million and £400 million — being removed from Northern Ireland's block grant. In the absence of a general policy for the United Kingdom, perhaps he thinks that that level of reduction would make good sense, but he and his party need to explain where reductions in departmental spending would be made.

Mr O'Loan: I welcome the change of position that the Minister has demonstrated, as indicated in Mr McNarry's original question. He is moving to ground that has long been argued by the SDLP.

Will the Minister accept that it was well known to all parties, including his own, that there would be a loss to the Northern Ireland block when we all made the case for a reduction in corporation tax? Does he agree that the evidence from other jurisdictions that have made a reduction in corporation tax is that the net gain in fiscal terms outweighs the loss of revenue from the direct corporation tax? That was well understood at the time. What has changed in the meantime to make him alter that position?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The case that was always argued was that any

consequence of a reduction in corporation tax would not be imposed immediately on the Northern Ireland economy, and the consequences would only feed through when there was an impact on additional investment. However, it is clear from the Treasury that that is not the case. I have based my decision on the fact that there would be immediate consequences for spending in Northern Ireland and only potential long-term benefits as a result of the reduction in corporation tax. However, I belong to a party that supports low taxation, and I still believe that there is a strong case for looking at a reduction in corporation tax right across the United Kingdom. That would not have an impact on the block grant here in Northern Ireland.

Business Consultancy Service

2. **Mr T Clarke** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of the work of the business consultancy service and the standard of its reporting. (AQO 1034/10)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The business consultancy service (BCS) is an internal departmental service, and it exists to serve all 11 Departments and their agencies, helping them to improve and modernise their services. It has a strong client satisfaction record, with clients rating 100% of its services as either excellent or good. The increasing use of the business consultancy service is in line with my wish — and the recommendations of the Public Accounts Committee — that the preferred option should be to use in-house resources rather than external management consultants for that kind of work. However, the code of practice for BCS precludes me, as Minister of Finance and Personnel, and my departmental officials from having any direct access to the work and findings of the BCS. It is the client Department's responsibility to set the terms of reference, to consider the findings and to decide on any actions that would come from such a report.

Mr T Clarke: In the light of the Minister's answer, does he endorse the business consultancy service's report on funding for prep schools?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I suspect that the Member's question arose from a comment that the Minister of Education made

during the debate on prep school funding. She pointed out that:

"The last time that I looked, the Minister of Finance and Personnel was from the party opposite." — [Official Report, Vol 49, No5, p370, col 1].

She also said that my Department provided the report, and the explicit result of that was that she attributed the findings of the report to me. I know that the Education Minister was in great difficulty and she had taken a decision that in my view is petty and vindictive and is another way of getting at grammar schools. She is angry because they defied her wishes on the selection procedure. I know that if I called her a liar, you would immediately rule me out of order; therefore, I will not do that.

I will use the words of Winston Churchill, and I believe that they are parliamentary. I believe that the Education Minister was guilty of a terminological inexactitude in the House, because it is clear that the report was requested by her. She set the terms of reference. The report was inconclusive; it said that further work had to be done, and it recommended what that additional work should be. The report belongs to the commissioning Department. It is totally independent, and, as far as I am concerned, my Department and I have given no endorsement to the report. It belongs to the Department of Education.

3.15 pm

Mr A Maginness: I thank the Minister for his reply. I understand that the business consultancy service acts independently, although it comes under the Finance Department. However, is there an opportunity there to expand its role in order to avoid undue and very high consultancy fees being paid to bodies outside government? Is that a way of creating efficiency in government?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The Member has hit on an important point. I am seeking to encourage Departments to use the BCS. Reports that are done by the BCS are totally independent; the outcome belongs to the Department, and there is no interference by me or my officials. Departments can be sure that they are getting an independent report. They can also be sure that they are getting value for money, because, first, the business consultancy service is staffed by people who are selected for their speciality. Secondly, because those people are working closely with Departments, they will

understand the culture of the public sector, and that is important. Thirdly, they benchmark all of their reports and their work against the service delivery of other consultancy organisations. There is good value for money on all of those counts. Therefore, Departments' use of the BCS, rather than outside consultants, would probably lead to a considerable saving for the public purse and mean that reports would be more understanding of the public sector.

Mr Speaker: Before I call Allan Bresland, I encourage Members to come to their questions more quickly. Members are making statements, and then coming to their question. I might even encourage the Minister to come to his answer sooner.

Dormant Bank Accounts

3. **Mr Bresland** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what progress has been made in relation to the dormant bank accounts scheme.

(AQO 1035/10)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: In his pre-Budget report on 9 December, the Chancellor reported that good progress was being made on the dormant accounts scheme. The co-operative financial services are working to submit their application to the Financial Services Authority, which will establish a reclaim fund, and, if the work continues as planned, the fund should be established later this year. The timing and the flow of the money to the Big Lottery Fund will, therefore, depend afterwards on the operations of the reclaim fund.

Mr Bresland: I thank the Minister for his answer. Does he intend to give priority to those who, for ethical reasons, are unable to accept money from the National Lottery?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: Part of the consultation tried to highlight the issue of faith-based groups, many of which were doing work that usually was covered by the grants available from the Big Lottery Fund, which, for ethical reasons, they decided not to apply for. We have to be careful that we do not ring-fence money in a way that discriminates against other groups, but when setting the criteria we must ensure that although the Big Lottery Fund is administering the fund, it does not carry the Big Lottery Fund brand. Therefore it should be more open to faith-based groups, and I hope that many of them who do excellent work, and who

should be funded for the work that they do, will be encouraged to make applications when the money becomes available.

Mr McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for the update on this question. In a sense, my supplementary question is related to Mr Bresland's point. Has the Minister considered drawing up guidelines and applying the funds to social economy projects, for instance, which would ensure the circulation and re-circulation of such funds within the local economy?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The guidelines are being drawn up, and it is hoped that they will be presented to the Executive for their approval in the near future. Of course, they will also be subject to scrutiny by the Committee for Finance and Personnel, of which Mr McLaughlin is a member. I imagine that the Assembly may even debate the issue too. All of the issues that the Member has raised will be contained in the particular guidelines. It is important that the money is not used for statutory functions, but for those functions that go beyond statutory duties and allow groups to make innovative use of it.

Ms Purvis: What priority has been given to the children and young persons' sector? Many responses that were received during the consultation requested that funds be used for that sector. What consideration do the guidelines give to prioritising funding for schemes that add value to that particular sector?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The guidelines cannot and should not ring-fence money for particular groups or activities. However, they will be broad enough to allow applications from the sector that the Member mentioned. It must be remembered that the fund is available for areas of social disadvantage, environmental work, and so forth. The Member will find that the guidelines will allow for applications from the kind of groups to which she referred.

Mr McCarthy: The Minister will be aware of the good work that is being carried out by children's organisations, such as Home-Start, Life Start, Sure Start. Is the Minister in any way minded to support those groups and give extra consideration to their needs if and when the opportunity arises?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The fund is not to be used as a substitute for mainstream Government spending. At this stage, I must clarify that some of the groups to which the Member referred receive mainstream Government spending. The consultation responses made it clear that respondents did not want the fund to substitute current Government spending, but to be directed to areas for which Government finance is unavailable. Therefore, that would probably rule out some of the groups that the Member mentioned.

Assembly Committees

4. **Mr McKay** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline any discussions he has had with other Ministers regarding the lack of information supplied by Departments to Assembly scrutiny committees, as outlined in the recent report on the review of 2010-11 departmental spending plans. **(AQO 1036/10)**

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I have been disappointed by Ministers' responses in providing information that is required for scrutiny of the 2010-11 Budget. I will outline the number of times and the ways in which I have contacted Ministers. On 7 January 2010, I wrote to Executive colleagues to request that they publish their plans to deliver additional savings for 2010. On 12 January, I made a statement indicating that I expected Committees to have that information so that they could scrutinise the plans properly. On 29 January, I wrote again to highlight the importance of transparency in the consultation process, which, again, meant that Departments should provide information. During the take-note debate on 9 February, Members again raised the issue that their Committees had not received that information. I, therefore, raised the matter with Ministers again. It was also a key theme for the Committee for Finance and Personnel. The Committee found it difficult to produce its report because Ministers had not supplied that information.

That issue crossed a number of Departments. The Health Committee and the Regional Development Committee were not in a position to comment on their Departments' proposals at all. The Education Committee and the Social Development Committee received only limited and headline information. The Agriculture Committee and the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister said that the papers were received late.

The Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure expressed concern about its Department's delay in publishing proposals on its website.

Mr McKay: I thank the Minister for his answer. Members will be aware that those difficulties arose in the run-up to the recent agreement at Hillsborough. Does the Minister believe that any progress has been made since the agreement at Hillsborough? His initial answer was not entirely positive. What further steps will he take to ensure that the situation improves?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I have not had any reports from Committees since that time on whether information has been received. In some cases, Departments have still refused to give information to Committees, and that is regrettable. I can only implore Ministers to comply. If the Assembly and its Committees are to work properly, the Committees need to have the information that is available so that they can scrutinise it.

I am pleased that the Finance and Personnel Committee accepted that my officials attended meetings on two occasions. Indeed, I also attended a meeting of that Committee. The Committee also received papers, and it commended DFP for its level of engagement. Of course, the Member would expect me to say that about my Department. However, it is important for Ministers to engage with Committees. Given the nature of the Assembly, the real scrutiny should take place at Committee level, and the information must be available to allow that.

Mr Bell: On the subject of the lack of information on budgets, will the Minister comment on the Departments that are failing in that area? Is he aware that the Education Minister has still not given the boards their budgets for the next year? That means that children's education is being damaged, no proper planning can take place and children with special educational needs in prep schools are crying themselves to sleep because they do not know whether they have a placement for 1 September this year.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: As I said earlier, when I was given the information, which was only a couple of days ago, the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and the Department for Regional Development had not provided any information at all. The Department of Education and the

Department for Social Development have given only headline information.

The Member made a good point. This is not just some paper exercise; it is a matter that impacts on the ability of people throughout the public service to plan ahead. Ministers ought to bear that in mind when dealing with their budgets and with how they pass on information about their budgets.

Dr Farry: Does the Minister agree that this is not just a theoretical exercise that looks at how things could have been done better? With the Conservative Party and others talking about taking possibly as much as £12 billion out of public expenditure after the election, we may have to face this pressing issue over the next year. Therefore, the Executive must give a clear message to all Departments to ensure that the exercise is done properly in the event that we have to go through it again.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel:

Absolutely, and as I said earlier, the nature of the Assembly means that we do not have an Opposition and a Government in the Assembly. Given that, the only way to deal with the detailed scrutiny of Departments is through Committees. Ministers should welcome that. It will be unpleasant and uncomfortable at times, and people such as Mr McNarry, Mr Farry and others will give Ministers a hard time, but that is the role of Members. However, Members can do that and Departments can avoid making mistakes only when that level of scrutiny exists.

Given that we could be entering an even more difficult time with budgets, I will be imploring Ministers to make information available to Committees. As the Minister of Finance, I will also want to know what the impact will be on Departments' budgets.

Bond Financing

5. **Mr Craig** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of the role that bond financing could play in assisting the Northern Ireland economy. **(AQO 1037/10)**

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: In theory, bond financing, particularly if it is targeted at infrastructure projects, should assist in the development of the local economy. However, the issue is raised frequently, and it is presented as something that the Northern Ireland Executive

could proactively take forward. It is a bit like the discussion that we had on corporation tax today.

Unfortunately, the practicalities of the public expenditure system mean that it is not as easy as that: any money that is raised through bonds adds to public sector borrowing. The Treasury will then reduce our departmental expenditure limits so that the long-term targets for borrowing and public expenditure are met. Therefore, although bonds may appear to be attractive on the surface, they do not lead to any additional money in the long term. Indeed, by the time we had paid the interest, we might be worse off.

3.30 pm

Mr Speaker: That ends questions to the Minister of Finance and Personnel.

Ms Ní Chuilín: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I see from the Minister's face that he is anticipating that I will raise the issue of some of his comments about my colleague the Minister of Education. Among other things, he referred to her as "petty and vindictive". Will the Ceann Comhairle look at the Hansard report? I believe the Minister's language to be unparliamentary and certainly not in keeping with the spirit of this place.

Mr Speaker: I was listening very carefully, and the Minister checked himself. I do not believe that the Minister crossed the line, because, as I say, he checked himself. Let me check the Hansard report, and I will come back to the Member directly or to the House.

Mr McLaughlin: *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Earlier today and yesterday, Members checked themselves because they knew that they were about to cross the line on parliamentary language. On this occasion, the Minister realised what he should not say and rephrased it. However, I will look at the Hansard report.

Mr O'Loan: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I draw your attention to other words that the Minister used in the same exchange. Referring to the Minister of Education, he said, "if I called her a liar". Is he not essentially doing that very thing? I ask you to look at the Hansard report and to consider whether that is appropriate language.

Mr Speaker: I have already said that I will look at the Hansard report. I have also told the House on a number of occasions that, when I

look at Hansard, I look at the contents around the debate. Having done that, I will come back to the Member. I ask the House to take its ease as we move to the next item of business.

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

Motion made:

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

Adjournment

Saville Inquiry Report

Mr Deputy Speaker: The proposer of the topic will have 15 minutes, and all other Members who are called to speak will have approximately five minutes.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Ar dtús, ba mhaith liom mo bhuíochas a ghabháil leis an Choiste Gnó as cead a thabhairt dúinn an t-ábhar tábhachtach seo a phlé an tráthnóna seo. Ba mhaith liom freisin a chur in iúl do theaghlaigh na ndaoine a maraíodh agus a gortaíodh ar Dhomhnach na Fola an meas atá agam orthu as an dóigh ar throid siad agus as a bhfeachtas teacht ar an fhírinne faoi cad é a tharla ar Dhomhach na Fola.

I preface my remarks by declaring that I am a member of the Bloody Sunday Trust and that I gave evidence to the Saville Inquiry. I also thank the Business Committee for providing time for the Adjournment debate on this important subject. It is an issue that relates to the constituency of Foyle but has wider implications throughout the community.

I want to use the debate to outline the concerns of the families and those who were wounded on Bloody Sunday and thus to help understand the justifiable reasons for their disappointment, frustration and anger. Even as we speak, the long and torturous wait for the publication of the report on the Saville Inquiry continues. I share those sentiments, as do many others. The Saville report is complete, but it cannot be published until after the British general election and a new British Government are in place. That could and should have been avoided, and the families, in their calm, focused and dignified manner, have indicated in precise terms how that could have been done. The families have said that they predicted the scenario that has unfolded and is now unfolding and that they outlined the steps required to avoid it in correspondence with Lord Saville and in

meetings and correspondence with the British Government since last summer.

Although one appreciates and understands the need for the independence of the judicial process, the families asked Lord Saville to work to a schedule that meant that he could have completed the report by 1 March 2010. However, the report's completion was allowed to drift past that date, and it was not finally handed over until 24 March. Had the report been completed by 1 March, all of this confusion would have been avoided. I think that Lord Saville displayed a degree of indifference to the families' needs and desires to have the report published before the British election was announced. The families did not ask for too much. Lord Saville had five years between the conclusion of the inquiry and now.

The British Government spurned the opportunity to do the right thing for what can only be described as partisan and sectional considerations. Once more, the British Government should have listened to the case as presented by the families and supported by legal opinion. Their case was simple: they put it forward that Lord Saville could have been permitted to stand over and pay due regard to any article 2 considerations relating to the right to life, which he had already done throughout the long inquiry without fault and, indeed, without any challenge. Any suggestion that Lord Saville would not have given due regard to so-called British national interest concerns is both disingenuous and bogus. However, the time spent on the so-called article 2 read ensured that the publication date was pushed past the impending election date. It also gave a distinct advantage to the British state and its agencies and, therefore, to those ultimately responsible for the murders on Bloody Sunday.

To compound all of that — this is very important — the article 2 read has not seen a single word changed or removed from the original text as presented by Lord Saville. There has been neither a single challenge nor even a suggestion of a breach of article 2 considerations. It is within that context that the families express their anger, frustration and disappointment, all of which are totally justified, and I hope that others agree with that. Their contempt for the article 2 read is obvious and well founded.

It must also be stated clearly that the families and their legal representatives suggested an alternative way to progress the report in

a manner in which no one would have been disadvantaged. The families did not seek an advantage over anyone else nor did they wish that any other person's legal rights be infringed or denied. I think that that highlights the integrity that the families have brought to the debate and shines poorly on those who did not respond to the legitimate demands that they made. I commend the families for that integrity and for securing the agreement that the report remains under the control of Lord Saville. That is an important victory for the families. In some way, it protects the integrity of the report, although the families have concerns, which are shared by many, that the agencies of the state have already read the report and have the ability, opportunity and, indeed, motive to leak it selectively when it suits them.

The families have not been deflected in their pursuit of the truth. I echo and support their call that the incoming British Government should make the publication of the report on the Saville Inquiry their first item of parliamentary business. Sinn Féin pledges its continuing support to ensure that that happens, and we urge others to support the families in that legitimate demand.

Mr Durkan: I commend Raymond McCartney for securing this Adjournment debate on an important issue, which, as he said, affects people not just in Foyle but more widely. The issue is particularly important to the families of those who were murdered on Bloody Sunday and to all the injured, who have been vexed by the delays in the publication of the Saville report and by the confusion, uncertainty and downright suspicion that inevitably surrounds the conditions of its publication. Having been told that the report would be ready for publication last year and then that it would be ready before the end of 2009, the families received the news that it would be ready by the week of 22 March 2010. Of course, that coincided with the countdown to the general election and with all the difficulties and uncertainties that that creates.

Like Raymond McCartney, I acknowledge the dignified determination of the families in contending with all the difficulties that have been in their way. They have focused in a very firm, fair, balanced and reasonable way on their clear needs and on the demand for a properly transparent publication process. They sought to ensure that publication would be immediate, without any room for interference

or manipulation on behalf of the Government or any agents of the Government. Unfortunately, at the Secretary of State's insistence that he has certain legal responsibilities to discharge, that did not happen. Nonetheless, the families were, at least, able to prevail on him to recognise that the responsibilities that he had stated needed to be discharged did not have to be discharged with the report in his custody but could be discharged with the report under the secure custody of Lord Saville. That is what the Secretary of State has had to accede to.

Unfortunately, in the circumstances, the families are left in a situation in which they know that all the lawyers appointed by the Secretary of State have seen the report. Although they can at least take comfort that those lawyers have not seen fit to persuade the Secretary of State to seek redactions in the report, they are left with the knowledge that those lawyers, some of whom are from the MOD, are obviously in possession of the information. The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Shaun Woodward, is asking those families to trust that MOD lawyers, who work in relation to national intelligence, will not betray any of that information to anybody else. Frankly, it is a bit too much to ask the families of the Bloody Sunday victims to take that assurance lightly.

Over this period of tension and suspicion as the families await the publication of the report, which can only take place after a new Parliament has been formed and the Secretary of State, whoever that may be, makes a statement, it is incumbent on us to show sensitivity. It is important that we show the families enough grace and consideration not to say anything insensitive about the background, conditions or cost of the inquiry. There will be time for people to again make those points as they have made them before. However, this is a time for sensitivity rather than speculation or contentious argument about these matters.

The families will want to know that the Saville report will be published unedited and with no interference. However, they will also want to know that its findings will be respected and reflected on by the body politic, not just here in the North of Ireland but in the Parliament at Westminster, by the British Government and by the wider British establishment, including the British media, which added to the hurt and the grievance. We know how the British establishment treated the events of Bloody

Sunday and how it honoured the people who were involved in murder that day. We know how the British media have treated the events of Bloody Sunday and the Saville Inquiry.

It is important to remember that there will be issues ahead: not just the verdict of the Saville Inquiry but the verdict on the Saville Inquiry. For the sake of the families, who are victims and have heard the innocence of their loved ones traduced, I hope that all parties in the House will, for the next few weeks, show some sensitivity and try to match the dignity of those families.

3.45 pm

Ms Anderson: Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank my party colleague Raymond McCartney for securing this debate on such a hugely important issue.

I begin by commending the dignity, resilience and determination of the Bloody Sunday families, who had their loved ones murdered or wounded on that terrible day in our city. It is hard to believe that it is 12 years since the then British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, announced a new inquiry under Lord Saville. The families have displayed incredible dignity and patience throughout all the delays, throughout all the obstacles, throughout all the attempts to frustrate and block the truth, throughout the destruction of evidence and throughout all the media attacks and all the false dawns. As Raymond McCartney has already pointed out, the families did not have a level playing field throughout the process; they met new obstacles at every turn. However, they remained constant, determined and dignified, and their struggle for truth and justice has been an inspiration to us all and to people involved in many other struggles across the world.

I was only a young girl at the time of Bloody Sunday, but I vividly remember the atmosphere that hung in the air — the anger, the despair and the helplessness. I clearly remember the sight of coffins lined up at St Mary's Chapel. That is an image that has remained ingrained in my mind to this day. That is what Bloody Sunday is to the people of Derry; it is something that has been ingrained in our consciousness. Whether we were at the march or not and whether we were even born or not, it is part of who we are.

The people of Derry know exactly what happened on that day. We never needed an inquiry to

tell us that the British state committed mass murder on the streets of Derry. We already knew that, because those who died and those who were wounded were our friends, family and neighbours. We already knew, because the thousands who witnessed the slaughter were our friends, family and neighbours. The truth of what happened that day has been passed down from father to son and from mother to daughter. The people of Derry are in no doubt about what happened on the streets of their town. However, the British Government attempted to suppress the truth. They did so, first, through the Widgery whitewash and, then, through decades of obstruction and intransigence. The families refused to allow them to succeed; they were not prepared to let the truth be buried with their loved ones. That is why they needed an inquiry to nail the lies and to set the truth free. However, they have had to wait for far too long.

When the Saville Inquiry was announced, hopes were understandably raised, and people believed that the long campaign for justice was coming to a close. We are all mindful of the huge volume of evidence that Lord Saville has had to consider, but few would have imagined that the process would take so long or face so much resistance. It is long past the time to set the truth free. I share the anger and frustration at the latest delay, which has been caused by the Westminster election.

I reiterate the call for the new British Government, of whatever hue, to publish the Saville report and, as Mark Durkan said, to do so unedited and without delay.

Mrs M Bradley: I call on all parties represented here today to show solidarity in this case. The families of the victims of Bloody Sunday have shown great dignity at all times, and the wait for the report is still, unfairly, going on. I hope that they will have no other obstacles to overcome before they receive the report in full. After all, all they want is the truth. They deserve the truth. I hope that, as soon as the election is over, the new Government make the matter a priority and issue the full report to the families. That is what they need and deserve. They do not need to read the report to know that innocent people died. However, they still want to hear the truth — and nothing else — from the Government.

Mr P Ramsey: I thank Raymond McCartney for bringing the debate to the Floor of the Assembly today. It is an important and timely discussion,

and it is an emotive subject for all Members, particularly those who live in Derry. There has been a great wound in the city for 40 years that has never been allowed to heal. We hope that the Saville report will, in some way, help that reconciliation. The families want the Assembly to support them to ensure that the tribunal report is published in a timely manner and in accordance with guarantees that were given to them by the Secretary of State. Regardless of the make-up of the next Government, that issue is extremely important to them. That is not an unreasonable expectation, and the House and all parties in it should support that.

The families of the people who were killed or injured on Bloody Sunday have been working and fighting for justice for nearly 40 years. As all Members have said, it has been a long and difficult road for them, and we commend their tolerance and patience throughout. During that time, the families have been subjected to hurtful remarks, innuendo and accusations, often from politicians who have suggested that the victims of Bloody Sunday were in some way guilty of a crime. They certainly were not. There have been frequent innuendos about the cost of the inquiry, the subtext being that the families received the money. Again, that is wrong. The cost could have been reduced significantly if the Ministry of Defence had co-operated with the inquiry properly.

Although I do not want to pre-empt the inquiry's findings, it will provide an opportunity for Members — Members from all parties are in the House for the debate — to outline the same specific concerns to unify the House today. The inquiry team has finalised the report, and officials have studied it to ensure that nothing in it jeopardises anyone's right to life. The families have had meetings with the Secretary of State and have received guarantees from him. They want any future Secretary of State to stand over those guarantees. One key guarantee is that the report will remain confidential, in the possession of the inquiry tribunal and unread by the Secretary of State until the night before it is presented to Parliament, at which time the Secretary of State will be able to pre-read it. The families want assurances that they will be allowed to pre-read the report simultaneously. Those arrangements will ensure equality of knowledge. That is a sign of respect for the families and will ensure that no information is leaked to the press or any other inappropriate organisation.

Fulfilment of the guarantees is important in creating trust and confidence. The families want to ensure that the report is published without delay and as a matter of priority. The way that the inquiry report is delivered and the subsequent actions based on its findings are important to people who have a fundamental interest in justice. Those aspects are important to the families and victims of Bloody Sunday and to the citizens of Derry and will mark the beginning of closure on a very painful part of the history of the conflict. For the families and the injured in particular, the report will not bring an end to the grief and loss but will be an important element in the grieving process and will help them to come to terms with their loss.

The Assembly has an opportunity today to show solidarity — I appeal again for solidarity — with the families and with those who were injured on Bloody Sunday and to commend them for their commitment to truth and justice. We must insist that the next British Government honour and adhere to the Secretary of State's guarantees, and we must insist that the publication of the report be an immediate priority for the new Government. It is incumbent on the Government to honour that agreement. I appeal to Members from other parties in the Chamber today and suggest that, if they participate in the debate, they should show respect and should honour the patience of those families.

Mr Campbell: The incidents that we are referring to today are the incidents of 30 January 1972. In any situation in which there is loss of life, it is obvious that the sympathies of wider society and those of us who represent the community should go to the families concerned, irrespective of the circumstances in which their relatives died. I have said that on a number of occasions.

Notwithstanding that — however painful it may be — no matter how many times revisionism has to rear its ugly head, it has to be confronted head-on, defied and defeated, and it will be again today. There are those who try to indicate that the events on that day in Londonderry were the seedbed for the Troubles, which destroyed much of life in Northern Ireland. I have heard it stated repeatedly, particularly by republicans, that had Bloody Sunday not happened, the history of Northern Ireland could have been different. That negates and disposes of all the violence and murder that preceded the events of 30 January 1972. It discounts the murders of the two policemen on the route of the march

three days before the events of 30 January. Those who try to rewrite history by saying that what happened on that day was such an enormous crime that it began the Troubles in Northern Ireland are engaged in revisionism of the basest sort.

The Saville Inquiry has cost almost £200 million. The scale of its cost is such that it is 20 times more expensive than the previously most expensive public inquiry in United Kingdom history. We are discussing the subject today as MLAs, but part of the reason why the Saville Inquiry has cost £200 million is because of other “MLAs” — the millionaire lawyers' association. Those people are still claiming tens of thousands of pounds, if not hundreds of thousands, five years after the last witness left the box. That is the scale of the inquiry, the outcome of which we await until whatever Government come back into power next month.

Unfortunately, soldiers were pressurised and demands made of them while they were on the Saville Inquiry stand that they should reveal all that they know. However, a man who stands in the Chamber — a one-time terrorist and latter-day democrat — was also in the witness box. Did he answer any questions? No. He could not answer, because a code of honour forbade him from doing so. That code of honour did not seem to apply to anyone else. He, the Member who secured the Adjournment debate and other Members who contributed to it demand of others something that they do not apply to themselves. They will not necessarily say that they will tell the truth about what they were doing. Martin McGuinness is the example of that.

Unfortunately, the Saville Inquiry has come to the point at which it needs to be brought into the public domain. It needs to be proceeded with and brought to a close. There are those who say that there is a distinction to be made between all the killings of the Provisional IRA and the killings of soldiers who were acting for the state. Whatever about the difference, there is no doubt that the Government of the Irish Republic resourced and financed the Provisional IRA. They did that in the late 1960s. There has never been an inquiry costing £2, never mind £200 million, into why that Government financed the brutal, murdering terrorists who finally saw the light after 30 years and are now demanding outcomes to which they were not prepared to subject themselves.

4.00 pm

Dr Farry: I congratulate Mr McCartney for securing the Adjournment debate. I welcome the opportunity to comment as a non-MLA for the Foyle constituency. The issue is a major one in Derry, but its implications affect the wider Northern Ireland area. It also remains an issue beyond our shores.

In some respects, the debate is a narrow one about the handling of the final stages of the Saville report. However, some of the broader issues have been touched on. The Alliance Party recognises that Bloody Sunday was one of the worst incidents that occurred during the Troubles, and that is not meant to diminish the hurt caused to families who lost loved ones in other major and individual incidents or the hurt caused to those who were injured in such events and are still with us.

For the families who suffered on Bloody Sunday, there are issues of truth and justice. There are also issues relating to the state and the approach that was taken to the rule of law in our society. From my party's perspective, there was a clear abuse of force by those who were acting on the part of the state: those who were killed were innocent, and that must be acknowledged. People have referred to the deeply flawed Widgery tribunal, but even within that tribunal, it was acknowledged that there had been a reckless use of force. I appreciate that its report compounded the wounds in Derry through the allegations that were made and that there is a demand to see the slate wiped clean through these conclusions.

There are major concerns in society about how the Saville Inquiry has been handled and the approach that has been taken to the process by a number of parties. There are also concerns around how that has contributed to the costs and the long period of time that the inquiry has taken. There are lessons to be learned from the process, and there will be different perspectives on what appropriate lessons are to be drawn. However, that will be a debate for another time.

Today, the challenges are how we can bring the inquiry to a conclusion; how the integrity of the process can be respected; how the impartiality of the conclusions and recommendations that may be made by Saville are respected and kept intact, and how the interests of all parties to the inquiry can be respected. The inquiry has been a hugely complex and multifaceted process as

the costs and length of time taken demonstrate. That throws up competing human rights issues that need to be taken into consideration. Nothing is ever straightforward, and this process is a particularly difficult one.

I appreciate that the timing of the conclusion of the report is most unfortunate, given the timescale of the British general election. Although we wish it were otherwise, we must deal with the situation in which we find ourselves today. As others have said, great patience has been shown by the families in holding back and having to put up with a frustrating end to a frustrating process.

There is a perception of risk if the report stays in the hands of the Government for a long period between conclusion and eventual publication. I appreciate that a more pragmatic approach has been taken by the outgoing Secretary of State, but it is a far from ideal approach on what is not an ideal situation. It carries risks, but, hopefully, those risks can be minimised.

I am happy to add my voice, and that of my party, to call on the incoming British Government, irrespective of their political colour, to ensure that the report is published quickly in the new Parliament. Major discussions will follow at Westminster, in this Chamber, and elsewhere regarding the outcome of that process.

Mr Attwood: I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the debate. Although I will make some broader comments that I think are relevant, the spotlight should rightly remain on the events of Bloody Sunday and the circumstances around the Saville report.

When Raymond McCartney rightly introduced the Adjournment debate, he talked about the anger, frustration and disappointment of the families in Derry. Mark Durkan talked about the dignified determination of those families despite all their difficulties. No one would dispute that those characteristics apply equally to dozens and, tragically, hundreds and thousands of families who have suffered the trauma of the death of a loved one, either at the hands of the state or an illegal organisation, over the past 40 years.

However, besides the families in Derry themselves, the community that is most relevant to what happened in Derry is the families of the 11 people who were killed in the Ballymurphy massacre fewer than six months before the Bloody Sunday killings. This debate is relevant

to, and should shine a spotlight on, their experience because the 11 people who were killed in Ballymurphy on the days of 9, 10 and 11 August 1971 were also killed by the Parachute Regiment.

Serious and substantial questions arise not just about the events of the Ballymurphy massacre but about the consequences of that as regards the massacre in Derry. That is because the Parachute Regiment that was responsible for the deaths in Ballymurphy was also responsible for the deaths in Derry fewer than six months later. Questions should be answered about the deployment of the Parachute Regiment in Belfast on those days and the subsequent deployment of the same regiment to the streets of Derry that gave rise to the deaths in January 1972.

The names of the people who were killed in the Ballymurphy massacre are not so well known because of the nature of our history and experience. Attention has not been directed on what happened in Ballymurphy over those three days in the way that it has in respect of other tragedies and traumas. However, the 11 people who died on those three days were: Frank Quinn; Hugh Mullan, a Catholic priest; Joan Connolly, a mother of eight; Daniel Teggart; Noel Phillips; Joseph Murphy; Edward Doherty; John Laverty; Joseph Corr; John McKerr; and Paddy McCarthy, who, although not shot, was traumatised by the British Army's actions and suffered a heart attack.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I ask the Member to return to the subject of the Adjournment debate.

Mr Attwood: I will do so immediately.

The parallels between the Ballymurphy massacre and the events of Bloody Sunday go deeper than the involvement of the Parachute Regiment. The parallels are that the Ballymurphy families have had no investigation, inquiry or accountability whatsoever. There has been a complete lack of truth, apology, acknowledgement and accountability. Many other people were killed during those three days and in the days afterwards. Over the three days of internment, 22 people were killed in the North: three members of the British Army and 19 civilians, both Protestant and Catholic, mostly in Belfast.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr Attwood: Truth and accountability applies to all of them.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. Will the Member resume his seat? I must ask that the Member return to the subject of the Adjournment debate, the Saville Inquiry.

Mr Attwood: To conclude, the arguments that have been made by virtually all Members who have spoken in the debate in respect of the Saville Inquiry, the circumstances of Bloody Sunday and the associated truth and accountability apply to many other circumstances in the North. However, they apply first and foremost to the Ballymurphy massacre, because what happened in Ballymurphy happened subsequently in Derry. The truth of what happened in Derry, which we trust Saville will get to, may help to enlighten people about what happened in Belfast fewer than six months beforehand.

Mr Bell: As a Christian, I want to make it absolutely clear that we all regret the events of Bloody Sunday. We are sorry that people lost their lives in Northern Ireland. As a father, I am conscious that many families who have lost loved ones may be listening to the debate. We say genuinely that there is deep sorrow at the terrorism and activities in Northern Ireland in which people lost their lives. It is awful for any family. None of us can really experience it until it happens to us.

However, the debate raises some very interesting questions that must be dealt with using not only sensitivity but honesty. Looking at the costs of the Saville Inquiry, we realise that, precious as those loved ones were, they were among over 3,000 people killed in Northern Ireland. Over 3,000 families lost loved ones. We must be careful that when we call for truth for Bloody Sunday, we call equally for truth for Bloody Monday, Bloody Tuesday, Bloody Wednesday, Bloody Thursday, Bloody Friday and Bloody Saturday. I would like Members to apply themselves.

There is much talk of state forces. The honourable Member for West Belfast Mr Attwood raised the point, correctly, that all those 3,000 families are entitled to the integrity, honesty and truth of what happened to their loved ones. We cannot, and I say this advisedly, take a George Orwell approach whereby:

"All animals are equal but some animals are more equal than others."

Will the Members who raised this subject reflect that, for many in my community — the unionist community — the loss on Bloody Sunday is no different from the loss of the policeman or the UDR man in their respective families? The pain that they experienced in loss is the same. They deserve the truth as to what happened. The people who perpetrated Bloody Friday deserve the truth, and the families of the victims of Bloody Friday deserve to know who was responsible as much as those of the victims of Bloody Sunday. We can never allow this House to create a hierarchy of victims.

It is difficult. Because I sit in the Assembly, people come to my constituency office or approach me in Orange Lodges, and they ask me, for example, how it is that £x million is poured into one inquiry and yet, though my father is dead, no one has been brought to justice, no money is spent on his case, his name does not appear in the paper, his case does not have the attention of international jurists, and so on. There is a real sense of grievance in the unionist community. We need to check why it is not getting honesty and truth at a level that is applied elsewhere.

We need to be careful that we do not isolate one particular incident; we must look at all the families. We point the finger at the state and call for the truth as to what happened. However, I was always cautioned that when one points the finger, three fingers point back. There is a responsibility on those in the terrorist organisations to tell the truth about their activities and their responsibility for the pain caused on that particular day.

I was first elected, after a ceasefire, to Craigavon Borough Council at 27 years of age. A number of weeks later, Constables Johnston and Graham lay dead on the streets of Lurgan, each shot in the back of the head. To the best of my knowledge, no one has ever been brought to justice. How am I to answer those people who ask me why £x million is spent on the Saville Inquiry —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Will the Member please resume his seat? I ask him, as I have asked Members previously, to return to the subject of today's Adjournment debate, which is the Saville Inquiry.

Mr Bell: I respect that ruling and bring that to a conclusion.

I am asking for the justice and the finance that have been spent on the Saville Inquiry to be applied evenly. We must be careful not to create a major grievance when that is not done. Those who call for justice, truth and integrity in respect of the Saville Inquiry are equally bound to give any information that they have about the loss of loved ones. That is the principle that lies at the heart of this debate.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Mr Bell: We should not allow a situation to develop where one victim is treated differently from another.

Adjourned at 4.15 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 19 April 2010

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Executive Committee Business

Housing (Amendment) Bill: Royal Assent

Mr Speaker: I wish to inform Members that the Housing (Amendment) Bill has received Royal Assent. The Housing (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2010 became law on 13 April 2010.

Assembly Business

Standing Committee Membership

Mr Speaker: I advise Members that I have received notification of the resignations of Lord Morrow as Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures with effect from 12 April 2010 and of Mr Raymond McCartney as Deputy Chairperson of the Assembly and Executive Review Committee with effect from 13 April 2010.

The Rt Hon Peter Robinson, the DUP's nominating officer, has nominated Lord Browne as Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures with effect from 13 April 2010. Lord Browne has accepted the appointment. Mr Pat Doherty, Sinn Féin's nominating officer, has nominated Mr Alex Maskey as Deputy Chairperson of the Assembly and Executive Review Committee with effect from 13 April 2010. Mr Maskey has accepted the appointment. I am satisfied that the correspondence meets the requirements of Standing Orders, and I therefore confirm Lord Browne as Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures and Mr Alex Maskey as Deputy Chairperson of the Assembly and Executive Review Committee with effect from 13 April 2010.

Public Petition

Camlough Road and Millvale Road Junction, Newry

Mr Speaker: Mr Dominic Bradley has sought leave to present a public petition in accordance with Standing Order 22.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh míle maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I wish to present a petition on behalf of the residents of the Camlough Road/Millvale Road area of Newry.

In the environmental statement record and subsequent local public inquiry, facilitated by the Department for Regional Development (DRD)-appointed inspectors Mageean and Chambers, into the A1 Cloghogue to Beech Hill dual carriageway, it was accepted that community concerns over local traffic access and egress to the Camlough Road would be catered for. That requirement was raised on behalf of the local community under records ES33 and ES42 respectively. In addition, the environmental statement is obliged by law to take into consideration the impact of the proposed scheme on the journeys that people, such as motorists, pedestrians, cyclists and equestrians, make in the locality.

By means of the petition, the Camlough Road and Millvale Road residents contend that the DRD, Roads Service and their contractors have not fulfilled the environmental statement duty of care to the local community. The residents wish to lobby the Minister for Regional Development, the Committee for Regional Development, Roads Service and their contractors to construct a roundabout at the Camlough Road/Millvale Road junction and, to alleviate current and future traffic problems, an additional eastbound lane from the roundabout to the Egyptian Arch.

Mr Speaker, I thank you for affording me the opportunity to present the petition, and I know that you will pass it on to the relevant agencies.

Mr D Bradley moved forward and laid the petition on the Table.

Mr Speaker: I shall forward the petition to the Minister for Regional Development and a copy to the Chairperson of the Committee for Regional Development.

Ministerial Statement

North/South Ministerial Council: Aquaculture and Marine Sectoral Format

Mr Speaker: I have received notice from the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development that she wishes to make a statement.

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Fáilte romhat. With your permission, Mr Speaker, I wish to make a statement in compliance with section 52 of the NI Act 1998 regarding the recent meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) in aquaculture and marine sectoral format.

The meeting was held in the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute's (AFBI) premises in Hillsborough on Wednesday 31 March 2010. The Executive were represented by Edwin Poots and me. The Irish Government were represented by the Minister for Science, Technology, Innovation and Natural Resources, Conor Lenihan TD. The statement has been agreed with Minister Poots, and I am speaking on behalf of us both.

The council welcomed a progress report on the work of the Loughs Agency that was presented by the chairperson, Tarlach O'Crosain, and the director of corporate services, John Pollock. Ministers noted the importance and effectiveness of the Loughs Agency's conservation and protection work on the fisheries of the Foyle and Carlingford areas; progress with the implementation of the agency's marine tourism development strategy through the roll out of the projects that are supported by INTERREG IV; the successful engagement with the Tourist Board and the initiation of the Riverwatch Phase 3 project; the Riverwatch outreach environmental science programme with local schools; and the implementation of an unsocial hours allowance scheme for the Loughs Agency's field staff. Payment of the allowance to the staff last month brought a very lengthy process to a conclusion, and it rewards staff for the unusual hours that they have to work.

In the progress report, the chairperson highlighted the Riverwatch project and the work that is being carried out with local schools. Ministers were interested to hear that 140 girls took part and that they learned about a variety of issues, including the food chain, life cycles,

habitats and pollution. They finished by having a go at angling. We heard that, as a result of that experience, a number of girls expressed an interest in the agency's angling academy.

Ministers noted that the Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission (FCILC) has applied efficiency savings to the draft 2010 budget in accordance with the efficiency delivery plan that was approved by the Finance Departments in November 2009. They also noted the draft 2010 business plan and the proposed budget for the FCILC. Furthermore, Ministers noted that, following approval by the two Finance Ministers, the business plan will be submitted to the NSMC for approval.

The council welcomed a presentation by the Loughs Agency on the monitoring of fish species diversity in Lough Foyle. Ministers noted the practical use of that information and how it is applied in management decisions by the Loughs Agency in the Foyle catchment. The monitoring related to a programme that was operated by the Loughs Agency in conjunction with Coolkeeragh power station in 2008 and 2009. Ministers heard that around 60 species had been identified, some of a high conservation value, and many which had not been expected so far up the estuary. We heard that relatively high numbers of smelt were being caught in the power station's water intake and how the Agency was working with the power station to find ways to reduce those numbers through new technologies and better timing of screen deployment.

The Council approved regulations that prohibit the retention of salmon, sea trout and brown trout from certain stretches of the River Finn and River Foyle, which is a necessary conservation measure in response to the observed decline of salmon populations in that river system.

Ministers considered the agency's legislation implementation plan, welcomed progress in its delivery and noted that further regulations will require NSMC approval during 2010. A proposal to introduce regulations to allow the suspension of netting and restrictions on angling in certain circumstances, including drought, flood and insufficient numbers of salmon, was of particular interest.

In recent weeks, Ministers from both jurisdictions met anglers from the north-west to discuss their concerns about salmon stocks. The contribution made to salmon conservation by the reduction

in commercial net fishing as a consequence of the offer of a hardship package which was taken up by many fishermen was noted, and we hope that the proposed regulations will allow the agency to take further measures to protect salmon stocks where necessary.

The Council also approved for a further year, to July 2011, a procedure to support the Loughs Agency in dealing, through regulations, with emergencies such as pollution incidents. Finally, the Council agreed that the next meeting in the aquaculture and marine sectoral format will take place in June or July 2010. Go raibh míle maith agat.

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

I thank the Minister for that report, during which she mentioned the Loughs Agency. There seems to have been a breakdown in communications between the Loughs Agency and the oyster fishermen. Has the Minister intervened? If discussions are ongoing or have taken place, what stage are they at?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development:

I have not been asked to intervene by either party. I have received no request for a meeting. Last year, the Loughs Agency and the oyster fishermen discussed regulations on how to measure retainable oysters in Lough Foyle, a matter that has been considered at further meetings with oyster fishermen. The Loughs Agency has suggested a compromise on the issue and has agreed to bring forward a further set of regulations to address issues raised in relation to the weight of retainable oysters. The original regulations will now be taken forward, and the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee indicated recently that it was content with that approach.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her statement. Does she have any more detail on the school project, and on whether or not it was a success?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development:

The statement covered most of my information, but I understand that St Mary's College in Creggan was involved in something like seven classes of girls. The Council felt that that initiative was an excellent way to make girls more conscious of environmental issues around the river and to interest them in fishing. The agency pointed out that the river is not exclusively for men. The fact that some women

have been involved in poaching and that the record salmon was caught by a woman goes to show that. That is an important message to send to girls and, indeed, all young people.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. How effective has the programme involving the Loughs Agency and Coolkeeragh power station been?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: It has been very beneficial for everybody concerned. As I said, 60 species of fish were found, some of which we did not expect to find so far up the estuary. Quite a bit of work is under way with Coolkeeragh power plant to try to find mechanisms to reduce the amount of fish caught up in the station's intake. The high number of smelt being caught is of concern. Although there is not a lot of commercial or recreational value in smelt, it has an important place in the food chain for other species, such as sea trout. The Loughs Agency and the power station operators are looking at ways to reduce the intake. It is also important that Coolkeeragh and the agency work to cut down on any kind of environmental damage to the lough.

12.15 pm

Mr McCarthy: I thank the Minister for her statement. Will she elaborate a little on the Riverwatch project? It seems that that is for schoolchildren. The Minister mentioned pollution; is there any similar project for adults?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: To clarify, Riverwatch is the Loughs Agency's interpretive centre, which is located on the banks of the Foyle at Prehen. It is a unique education resource and a very important tourist attraction. It is not just available to schools; it is available to communities, business organisations and others. It is certainly worth a visit. If any Committees meet in that area, I encourage them to go to Riverwatch.

The aim of the centre is to ensure the environmental survival and maintenance of the economic benefits of the Foyle and Carlingford waterways by increasing the level of knowledge of those who directly and indirectly use their resources. It also helps with our behaviour, making us more conscious about using cleaning materials in the home that could get into our rivers and lead to pollution incidents. Septic tanks on farmland can also cause problems. We are aware of the

damage that a small amount of pollutant can do, especially when river levels are low. The Riverwatch centre has recently been refurbished. I encourage all Members to go to visit that very valuable tourism resource in Derry.

Mr Campbell: The Minister mentioned salmon stocks. There is concern about those stocks in various rivers. She also mentioned the proposed regulations that would allow the agency to take further measures to protect stocks. When will anglers be made aware of those measures?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: The anglers are keenly aware of the work that needs to be done. I had an excellent meeting with them at the Loughs Agency office not that long ago. We hope that the regulations will be in place before the start of the angling season, but their nature means that they can kick in if there is a worry about stocks, or if there are drought conditions or flooding.

I assured our anglers that I would do my best to ensure that the regulations were in place before the angling season began. If we approve them over the next couple of months, they will be in place in time. The fishermen were generally content that, if we are worried about numbers, we can switch fishing activity on or off in light of environmental conditions to protect river stock. They recognise the benefits of line fishing to the tourism industry in the north-west. They made a very robust case about needing to protect our tourism product in the north-west, given the economic decline of the region. Seagate and other companies have laid off people, and the fishermen are concerned that the tourism potential of the area should be realised. It is important that the regulations are implemented, and I am very anxious to do that as early as possible.

Mr Leonard: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her statement. During her meeting with the anglers, I understand that she discussed the possibility of a further hardship scheme for commercial salmon netmen, which would remove the remaining nets from the Foyle area. Will she provide further details of that?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: That meeting was held on 24 March. I met representatives from Limavady Borough Council, the Roe Angling Association and the Ulster Angling Federation to discuss the issue of declining stocks. The angling groups presented me with a paper that outlined a

proposal for a further buyout scheme that would remove the remaining commercial nets from the area. However, I highlighted the fact that the numbers of commercial nets had already been significantly reduced through the salmon hardship package that was operated by the Loughs Agency. It would be difficult, therefore, to justify further public expenditure. The Loughs Agency believes that the further regulations that I have talked about, in conjunction with the reduction in nets, will address the issue of declining stocks without the need for a further buyout scheme. At the NSMC meeting on 31 March, Ministers agreed that that was the correct approach for the agency to adopt.

Mr Savage: There has been much comment about the salmon industry. Will the Minister give us an update on what has been taking place regarding salmon in that part of the country?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: As Members will have heard, the reduction in commercial nets has resulted in fewer salmon being caught in the Foyle and Carlingford areas, and that has had a benefit to the numbers. However, we are continually monitoring fish stock numbers. A number of areas on the rivers have counters, and we monitor the levels of fish very carefully. We ensure that we manage stocks from a conservation point of view and also protect fish for the angling industry and for the tourism potential that it can bring. Therefore, a lot of work has been done.

There is also a lot of concern about the numbers of salmon returning from the Atlantic and the fact that the salmon numbers are falling there. What happens outside our control is important, but we cannot do a lot about the Atlantic. Nevertheless, fish are being monitored, and we are watching them coming back. We want to have those regulations in place so that we can switch the fishing effort off if we are concerned about the levels of fish in the Foyle/Carlingford catchment.

Mr McDevitt: I thank the Minister for her statement. Following on from the last series of questions, I am sure that the Minister will agree that a healthy angling stock, particularly in the Foyle catchment, has huge strategic tourism importance. Will the Minister update the House on the numbers through the counters in the Foyle catchment this year? How does it compare with the previous year?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: We did not discuss counters at the NSMC meeting, as we had done so at an earlier meeting. Therefore, I do not have that level of detail here, but I will be happy to respond to the Member in writing with updated statistics.

Ministerial Statement

British-Irish Council: Social Inclusion Sectoral Format Meeting

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.

Mr F McCann: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Given that social inclusion and the third sector are the remit of the Social Development Minister, is there any reason why she will not be delivering the speech this afternoon?

Mr Speaker: I received the letter from Mr Newton. The issue sits with the Executive, and it is their responsibility.

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 a British-Irish Council (BIC) social inclusion meeting which was held in Edinburgh on 26 March 2010. The Minister for Social Development, Margaret Ritchie, also attended that meeting, and she has kindly agreed that I make a statement to the Assembly on behalf of us both.

The meeting focused on the contribution of the third sector to social inclusion across all eight member Administrations. Arrangements for the meeting, including an opportunity to hear about innovative developments in the third sector, were made in partnership with the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations and Community Enterprise in Scotland.

The meeting was chaired by John Swinney MSP, who is Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth in the Scottish Government. The British Government were represented by Rolande Anderson, director general of the Office of the Third Sector and the Social Exclusion Task Force. The Irish Government were represented by Don Sexton from the Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs. The Welsh Assembly Government were represented by Carl Sargeant AM, Minister for Social Justice and Local Government. The Northern Ireland Executive were represented by Margaret Ritchie MLA, Minister for Social Development, and me, in my capacity as junior Minister in the Office

of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM). The Isle of Man Government were represented by the honourable Eddie Teare MHK, Minister for Health and Social Security. The States of Jersey were represented by Senator Paul Routier, the assistant Chief Minister, and the States of Guernsey were represented by Deputy Hunter Adam, the Health and Social Services Minister.

The British-Irish Council discussed the recent developments in social inclusion in each of the BIC member Administrations, focusing particularly on issues relating to the contribution of the third sector, which is known by many here as the voluntary and community sector. In March 2008, BIC Ministers agreed that the contribution of the third sector to social inclusion would be the next theme of the social inclusion work area. At the Council meeting in Edinburgh on 26 March, Ministers reviewed a report on the work carried out by BIC's social inclusion group on the contribution of the third sector. Collectively, we noted that the third sector across all member Administrations is complex and diverse and that it has a significant social and economic potential. We also acknowledged that the third sector has a reach to people and communities who statutory agencies sometimes find more difficult to engage.

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

Ministers commended the excellent examples of investment and good practice across all member Administrations, and we agreed that the theme had led to a dynamic process of learning and co-operation, which reflected the original intention of the British-Irish Council.

With regard to the future work programme, the Council agreed that there are major immediate challenges facing the third sector and member Administrations. Those include challenges on how the third sector, working together, can make communities more sustainable and socially cohesive and how we can enable wider civil activity and enable the third sector to become part of the mainstream in service delivery. We, therefore, agreed to the continuation of the third sector theme, rather than selecting a new theme at this stage. The work carried out by the officials will continue to seek to strengthen and consolidate the ongoing co-operation and exchange of information, experience and best practice between member Administrations.

Ministers welcomed the report and noted that the next ministerial meeting will take place in Wales on a date to be agreed.

Mr Weir: In light of the fact that public finances are likely to tighten after the election, regardless of whether it is a Brown, Cameron or Clegg Administration, what reassurance can the junior Minister give to people in the third sector from a financial point of view?

The junior Minister (Mr Newton): The Member's question is extremely relevant. I have no doubt that the question of cutbacks and the cutback promises that are being made in televised electoral broadcasts are foremost in the minds of those who are engaged in our community and voluntary sector, or the third sector, as we are referring to it.

As colleagues will be aware, the Executive agreed their 2010-11 Budget about 10 days ago, and, at this stage, I am unable to tell Members what the breakdown of budgets will be. However, at this time of economic recession, I believe that the voluntary and community sector has a key role to play in helping the Government to deliver on their social inclusion agenda, and I said that in my remarks. There is a potential there that should be harnessed and exploited, and I use that word in its positive sense. We must ensure that every pound that we spend delivers maximum benefit for the most disadvantaged throughout our communities, and the focus must be on delivering effective and efficient services that meet the needs of our communities, rather than the survival of an organisation that, in some cases, may not meet existing needs.

That said, however, there is, as I have said, potential that should be harnessed. There is willingness in OFMDFM and permeating through every aspect of government to ensure that our service delivery is as effective and economical as possible.

12.30 pm

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his statement. My question follows on from that of Mr Weir. The statement accepts the third sector's contribution not only to communities but to society as a whole. The issue of possible cutbacks has been raised. In order for the third sector to operate effectively, it needs proper and sustainable funding, not the mishmash of

funding that exists at the moment. Was there any discussion of the possibility of mainstream funding for the third sector in the light of the work that it does? Most statutory organisations would accept that, pound for pound, funding in the third sector is well spent and achieves maximum value.

The junior Minister (Mr Newton): I accept the Member's point, which is well made. We are all aware of the experience during previous years of community and voluntary organisations in the third sector that had reached a point at which they were right at the very edge of their agreement before a final or other agreement was put in place. In fact, some are beyond a current agreement before another one is put in place. There is a lot of concern about that.

I take the member's point. I am not sure that, at this stage, we can indicate that there will be mainstream funding. However, if we are to ensure that service delivery is effective and economical, we have to get our act together a bit better, if I may use that expression, so that in the longer term a plan and process can be implemented in which there is engagement on both sides — from statutory bodies, government, OFMDFM and the voluntary and community or third sector. It is only when that level of professionalism, budgetary allocation and so on is built up that we can expect service delivery to be efficient and effective.

Mr Elliott: I thank the junior Minister for his statement. I note his comment that the Council will:

"enable the third sector to become part of the mainstream in service delivery."

Does the junior Minister mean delivery which is right at the heart of the public sector? If so, how will that be achieved?

The junior Minister (Mr Newton): I am trying to find the exact phrase that I used in my statement. Following on from the previous question — obviously, the two questions are linked — I can say that it is certainly our ambition to deliver services in a much more effective way. How we do that is still to be explored fully. Although the question is relevant, I cannot give it a definitive answer at present.

Mr McDevitt: I am sure that we all recognise the social capital that exists in the community and voluntary sector and, increasingly, the

positive economic contribution that the sector makes to the region and the island. Does the junior Minister accept that the mechanism by which the community and voluntary sector was funded, the Executive programme funds, which were abandoned by his party and Sinn Féin, should be reconsidered now so that we can be sure that, when money is made available for the community and voluntary sector, it gets to that sector and is not lost in administration?

The junior Minister (Mr Newton): I do not accept the Member's comments at all. There is always room for improvement. I have acknowledged that in my remarks and in my responses to previous questions. There is work to be done. I do not accept the Member's point that it is the fault of the DUP and — it is not for me to speak for that party — Sinn Féin, if it is coming through OFMDFM.

Mr Dallat: I also welcome the Minister's statement. I am sure that, in the lengthy discussions that took place, an awful lot more was discussed than is included in the statement. Has the Minister picked up on good ideas in other regions, particularly in the Gaeltacht areas, that could be introduced and built on here? Will we have the opportunity to have a more detailed report on what went on with regard to the community and voluntary sectors and how they can be promoted and grown in these awful times?

The junior Minister (Mr Newton): The Member has asked a positive question. I will build my answer around the focus of the social inclusion group. Yes, we will have further information. The Member asked for an in-depth report. Work on the topic has focused on the contribution of the third sector to the promotion of social inclusion, which I am sure the Member will welcome. The work fell under three main themes, with initial priority being given to the first theme of responding to the effects of the economic downturn — something that we are all suffering from at the moment — which includes developing the roles of the third sector and broadening the appeal of volunteering and citizen involvement.

We all recognise that the third sector is an important part of the economic and social recovery from recession. At the same time, it is affected by both an increased demand for the many services it provides and the financial pressures resulting from the economic

downturn. Appropriately targeted responses to those pressures, jointly developed with the sector, are evident across all the BIC Administrations. However, as pressure grows on the amount available to spend on public services, the third sector, because of its ability to respond innovatively and quickly and to reach people in the communities with which the statutory agencies sometimes find it more difficult to engage, can provide alternative service solutions.

Members asked about developing the role of the third sector. The sector has an evident ability to bridge the gap for those furthest from the labour market. Partnership working is often the key to the sector's contribution to social inclusion. Some possible success factors have been identified. However, current and future challenges for the sector include increased demand and reduced income; the impact of information technology; building sustainable communities; social and political change; and, perhaps most importantly, relationships between the third sector and government.

There have been many innovative developments in volunteering and citizen involvement. The evidence review shows how volunteering plays a crucial role in programmes where third sector organisations engage with and support people facing multiple and complex needs on their journey to employment, with many of the volunteers acting as positive role models. That particular theme was less well developed, given the scope of the work involved in the other two themes, and we all recognised that it would benefit from further work, particularly given the future demographic trends and developments in active citizenship.

The Member asked what had been learned. Involvement in the BIC social inclusion group has allowed officials in the Department for Social Development's voluntary and community unit to make valuable contacts with colleagues across the BIC Administrations. Those contacts and the work of the group have allowed us to share our experiences and good practice. Sometimes our experiences have been much more focused than those in other areas, and that can be understood when we are talking to Jersey, Guernsey and the Isle of Man.

Outside the work of the group, there have been reciprocal visits between Administrations and jurisdictions to discuss areas of common

concern. Specifically, there have been visits to and from England and Wales to share details of approaches to the management of relationships between government and the sector. That sharing of information and ideas has greatly assisted us in the development of a new concordat for relationships in the sector, which is intended to replace the 1998 compact and to reflect our newly developed political institutions.

I could go on if the Member wishes —

Mr Weir: Please do not.

The junior Minister (Mr Newton): Perhaps I will take my lead from my colleague Mr Weir. Considerable benefits will come from the approach being taken to learning and the sharing of information across the devolved Administrations.

Executive Committee Business

Local Government (Finance) Bill: First Stage

The Minister of the Environment (Mr Poots):

I beg to introduce the Local Government (Finance) Bill [NIA 14/09], which is a Bill to make provision for the financial affairs of district councils; to make provision relating to grants to district councils and for payments to councillors and other payments by district councils.

Bill passed First Stage and ordered to be printed.

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

Committee Business

Standing Committee Membership

Mr Deputy Speaker: As with similar motions, the motions on Standing Committee membership will be treated as business motions. Therefore, there will be no debate.

Resolved:

That the Lord Browne and Mr Stephen Moutray replace the Rt Hon Jeffrey Donaldson MP and Mr Jonathan Craig as members of the Public Accounts Committee. — [Lord Morrow.]

Resolved:

That Mr Mickey Brady replace Mr Billy Leonard as a member of the Committee on Standards and Privileges; and that Mr Paul Butler replace Mr Raymond McCartney as a member of the Committee on Procedures. — [Mr P Maskey.]

Resolved:

That Mr Fred Cobain be appointed as a member of the Assembly and Executive Review Committee. — [Mr Armstrong.]

Private Members' Business

Cafe Culture Society

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

Mr P Maskey: I beg to move

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.

Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Business Committee for rescheduling the motion. It was scheduled to be debated a number of weeks ago but was moved with my agreement to allow Executive Business to be tabled.

The motion is important, because there is some confusion when it comes to the hospitality and tourism sector. In some cases, councils have commended cafes and restaurants on what they have done with the outside of their buildings by placing flowers, tables and chairs to allow people, especially on a day like today, to enjoy the weather as well as their food. People may wish to enjoy a cup of coffee or another type of drink, and they could enjoy the good weather on days such as today. Councils have commended some cafes and restaurants, and, on the very same day, Departments have told them that they must remove their outdoor furniture. That is a contradictory approach. Councils have approved and agreed to the provision of outdoor facilities and commended many of the restaurants and cafes that have taken forward the idea, and I also commend them. Those businesses have invested much money in the current economic climate of hardship.

12.45 pm

I have been contacted by restaurant, cafe and bar owners in Belfast, and there is much anger. At one time, I was a member of Belfast City Council, where a big debate took place on promoting a cafe culture society in Belfast. However, the issue is much larger than being only a matter for

Belfast. Derry city centre management and some of the other smaller towns and villages in the North of Ireland have been trying to move the idea on much more speedily.

Three Departments are responsible for taking the lead on the issue: the Department of the Environment (DOE), the Department for Regional Development (DRD) and the Department for Social Development (DSD). Those Departments will work in tandem with some of the councils. We are calling for legislation, and we hope that we can reach agreement on that in the Assembly even though attendance today is reduced, perhaps because some Members are electioneering. Regardless of the attendance in the Chamber, the motion is important. We want joint working in the Executive, especially among DOE, DRD and DSD, to allow the legislation to be introduced more speedily.

Considerable investment has been made in the streetscape and landscape of our city centres. I urge that more thought and imagination be put into the planning process when cities, towns and villages are being regenerated. That will allow businesses to put forward proposals for outside tables, chairs and awnings to allow people to enjoy their coffee, alcohol or food. It is an important issue.

Businesses have stepped up to the mark by putting their own money into creating a better atmosphere in towns and a nicer society outside their buildings, yet they are being restricted from doing so. A cafe culture encourages the use of the frontage of some of the buildings that are used in the hospitality industry. Specific legislation does not allow for that in places such as Belfast, Omagh and Derry, about which my colleague Raymond McCartney will say a few words. That shows that we lag behind our European counterparts when it comes to providing for hospitality and the tourism industry. There is frustration and confusion out there, and I highlight the difference between councils commending those businesses and Departments telling them to remove outdoor furniture.

The research paper in the Members' information pack contains much discussion about extending licensing hours. The motion is not about that, so I urge Members not to take that from the information pack. I am not calling for licensing hours to be extended. Any of us who have been to European cities will know that people can take their meals outside a restaurant and enjoy

them. Most people sit and “people watch” when they are on holiday. It would be illegal to do that in some of our towns.

It is important that the legislation be introduced as a matter of urgency. We must encourage local people to have pride in their communities and their cities and ensure that tourists who come to the cities, towns and villages of the North of Ireland can promote that pride when they return home. That is an important step.

Some of the cafes in Belfast city centre and throughout the North are not allowed to open until 1.00 pm on Sundays, and I hope that we will be able to debate that issue at a later stage. I have seen hundreds of tourists walking empty streets on Sundays because no businesses are open. The important issue of Sunday opening hours should be looked at when it comes to legislation.

The key to this motion is that the legislation should be brought forward as a matter of urgency to allow businesses to move into the future in a more focused way. Currently, they cannot do that. If it is a nice day in places such as Dublin and Galway, there will be hundreds of people sitting outside cafes enjoying their food. It is wrong that people cannot do that here.

At the moment, if someone has an accident outside a cafe, he or she can bring a claim against that business, because the legislation is not in place. Businesses are, therefore, left open to such claims. Clearly, there are issues with having chairs and tables on footpaths and pavements, because that can restrict wheelchair users, people with disabilities and those pushing prams or buggies. Therefore, legislation needs to be brought forward that allows businesses to see exactly what the criteria are. There must be room on the pavements for people with disabilities such as the blind, who may need a walking aid, and people with prams. It is, therefore, important that that be included in the legislation.

I urge DOE, DRD and DSD, which, I think, took the lead on this issue at one stage, to work together. I looked at some of the debates at Belfast City Council, and this problem has been going on for years. Local businesses are, therefore, frustrated that the issue has not been taken forward. I wish to see more joined-up working among the Departments and councils, because that will enable businesses to move forward. I note that Belfast City Centre

Management has in place a memorandum of understanding among some businesses, but that is not legally binding. I raised the issue of people advertising on the streets. The memorandum states that outside areas cannot be used for advertising purposes but are for people to be able to sit down, relax and enjoy their surroundings.

I want to see cafes here brought into line with those in other places. DETI, the tourism board, the Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau and the regional tourism partnerships also have a part to play in promoting a cafe culture. DOE, DRD and DSD need to sit down and work on this. They have been talking about the issue for years. However, I now wish to see legislation to ensure that the hospitality and tourism industry moves forward in a more positive manner by creating jobs and generating more revenue.

Mr Shannon: I support the motion. I was in Conway Square in Newtownards this morning, and, although it was a wee bit on the cool side, the sun was shining. There is one restaurant there that opens at about 7.00 am every day, and I saw the intrigue and interest that people had in that venue. I hail from one of the most beautiful of our counties. It has untold tourism potential, with its rich history and modern facilities. I, therefore, agree with the promotion of the tourism, leisure and hospitality industries in the Province and Strangford, in particular. If I did not mention Strangford at least once every time that I spoke in the Chamber, there would be something wrong.

I am not entirely convinced that a cafe culture can help us to achieve our potential, but it can play a part. We need a tourism explosion in the Province that can and should be ignited from the Chamber, and perhaps today's debate is one method of doing that. I have stated in a previous debate on Strangford's tourism potential that the Lonely Planet travel guide said that Northern Ireland is:

“abuzz with life: the cities are pulsating, the economy is thriving and the people, the lifeblood that courses through the country, are in good spirits”.

Belfast was also mentioned in another part of that guide as one of the top 10 cities “on the rise”.

Views of our beautiful historic Province, coupled with the vivacity that is linked with anything that

originates from Northern Ireland, cannot help but draw others to our shores. Perhaps that will be enhanced through today's debate.

Whether it is for rest and recuperation in our salons and five-star hotels, nature holidays, touring the country and residing in quaint B&Bs, touring in a caravan and using our mini-caravan parks or shopping in the city followed by dinner and a show, Northern Ireland has it all. Therefore, it is important that there is a sincere push to show the rest of the world just what we have.

The hidden jewel in the Province's crown is, undoubtedly, Strangford, and Members will shortly hear my colleague from Strangford make similar comments. The breathtaking view from Scrabo Tower in Newtownards to the Mourne on one side, Scotland and the sea on the other and Belfast city behind it is one that cannot be matched or surpassed. In Newtownards town, there is a superior hotel and superior nightlife, a weekly market, cinemas, a great shopping complex and beauty salons aplenty, one of which was an all-Ireland beauty salon finalist. Down the peninsula, there is beauty and wildlife aplenty, with many coffee shops, tea shops, antique shops and superior places to eat. That is just a small selection of what is happening in Strangford.

History and culture are rich around the Ards, with the well-known Scrabo Tower and Mount Stewart house and gardens. We also have the only example of a working fishing village, Portavogie, and the beauty of its landscape is coupled with caravan parks and B&Bs.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I ask the Member to return to the subject of the debate and leave Strangford for the moment.

Mr Shannon: I will mention the debate every now and again through tourism. The reason that I said all that, Mr Deputy Speaker, is quite simple: it is an example of what we can do and what we can use.

In Portaferry, Exploris had 200,000 visitors last year and has the capacity for more. The motion gives us an opportunity to promote that and to do more. In our area, the Battletown gallery of craft and industry has been very successful, as many other folk will tell you. People can come to Eden pottery to buy or make pottery. There is the Castle Espie wetland and wildfowl centre near Comber, and the monastic life is represented by St Patrick and his history in

County Down. All those things are part of the tourism, leisure and hospitality industries that we are trying to promote.

We cannot forget country sports. The game fair at Ballywalter attracts a record number of people through tourism and leisure and is promoted by Ards Borough Council and others. Some American shooters came to that event and spent £50,000, which is an example of what can happen when something is promoted right and taken advantage of.

Through the Budget, the Minister has shown the emphasis that is put on tourism so that it can take its rightful place in the future of Northern Ireland. I ask all Members to recognise and exploit the potential of their constituency, while realising that few will compare with what beautiful Strangford has to offer. The potential and the backing are there. For the benefit of the whole Province, let us make something of it and show Northern Ireland as a beautiful nation.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Mr Shannon: I urge Members to support the motion. I am sure that they will and that Members will all come to Strangford next week for their holidays.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The advertisements are over. I call Mr John McCallister.

Mr McCallister: I assume that the Member means Strangford town in the beautiful South Down constituency. However, I will draw the advertising to a close.

Mr Shannon: I mentioned in my introduction the ferry from Portaferry to Strangford. That is the one that I am referring to.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr McCallister: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. That was an easily earned extra minute.

The Ulster Unionist Party supports the development of the cafe, restaurant and tourism industries. Tourism is recognised as one of the key areas for growth in our economy, and we recognise how a cafe society could promote a vibrant tourist industry in the cities and towns in every constituency across Northern Ireland. We recognise the genuine need for the Department for Regional Development to legislate to regulate sitting-out areas on pavements.

At present, that does not happen. Roads Service has a duty to maintain the public highway and, therefore, can remove anything that causes an obstruction. It should also be noted that, owing to old shop frontage areas, some cafes and restaurants own the areas immediately outside their premises, and that allows their business to spill out on to the streets. However, in the interests of businesses and pedestrians, it is crucial that adequate regulations be introduced that encourage an outdoor service industry while ensuring a free flow of pedestrians around our urban areas and into local shops and amenities.

1.00 pm

The Ulster Unionist Party supports the cafe, restaurant and licensing industries, which play an important role in our society. However, we are cautious about the wording of the motion and its potential ramifications. In calling on the Executive to introduce legislation, Sinn Féin has proposed a motion with a wide scope, which potentially goes beyond the use of pavements by cafes and restaurants.

We must not forget that the intention of the Licensing Act 2003 in England and Wales was to introduce a cafe culture on the mainland. However, by permitting a more flexible licensing regime, the Act allowed pubs and clubs to extend significantly their opening hours and, in some cases —

Mr P Maskey: Will the Member take a point of information?

Mr McCallister: I will.

Mr P Maskey: I thank the Member for giving way. That is why I mentioned that example. The purpose of the motion is to allow businesses to use the space in front of their premises; it does not call for an extension to drinking hours. The motion is about allowing customers of cafes and restaurants — even pubs in some cases — to sit outside and eat their food. It is not about creating additional drinking hours.

Mr McCallister: I am grateful for that clarification. I apologise for not being in the House to hear the Member's opening remarks.

It is important that we learn lessons from our colleagues across the water, who, by extending licensing hours, let a culture of all-day drinking develop. The concept of moving towards a more European culture is fine, but the Member will understand the problems that it creates,

such as binge drinking, which puts enormous pressure on policing resources. Binge drinking also has enormous implications for our Health Service, which is already struggling with financial pressures.

That point needs to be made. It would have been very useful to include wording to that effect in the text of the motion, because there would be huge concern if we were to extend the licensing hours without proper debate and scrutiny. An extension of licensing hours would require serious consideration, because of all the problems that I mentioned. The Member, like me and other Members present, knows that we are experiencing many antisocial behaviour problems and that our towns are almost becoming no-go areas at certain times of the day. All-day drinking is not something that we want to promote.

We should learn lessons from across the water and promote the positive aspects of having a cafe culture. One has only to think of the example of the Holylands area of Belfast, which has been blighted by antisocial behaviour and serious binge drinking problems. Therefore, we need to be cautious.

The Minister for Social Development proposed changes to the licensing laws. We need to ensure that any changes would benefit all our society and tackle health and antisocial behaviour problems.

We support the concept of promoting a cafe culture. The benefits of such a culture to tourism could be enormous, and it is something that we want across constituencies in all parts of Northern Ireland —

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

Mr McCallister: — particularly in beautiful South Down.

Mr McDevitt: If the debate highlights one point, it is the disconnect that still exists in this region's Executive. The debate is an important one, and the SDLP thanks its colleagues for bringing the motion to the House.

However, it points out how little connection takes place in reality, because, to fulfil the potential for a cafe culture, we need a planning system that understands the economic opportunities of tourism, a regeneration strategy that is willing to

support that in the long term and a civic culture that is embracing and open.

A famous economist in America called Richard Florida talked about the concept of a creative city, which is the very place where a cafe culture would flourish. He said that a creative city is a brilliant place that brings together people who disagree. It is a place where there is talent, not only in the street-watching sense of the word, but where there are people who have the ability to use their brains and knowledge to deepen the economy. It is also a place with a technological base where business flourishes because the community welcomes difference. Most importantly, it is a place of tolerance.

I wish that we could debate cafe culture or the broader questions of a tourism strategy in a much more strategic way and that we did not have to bring private Members' motions to the House to give some voice to such opportunities. By definition, a private Members' motion — welcome as it is — will fall short of what is needed. Quite simply, we need to transform Belfast from the ghost town that it is every Sunday morning. I am sure that, like me, many Members have, from time to time and in a desperate attempt to redeem themselves, offered to take their family for a Sunday morning breakfast. I am sure that Members who, like me, represent a constituency that extends to the city centre feel a duty to bring their family into the centre. However, there is nowhere to eat and, in the summer, there is practically nowhere in the city to sit outside. Although I do not know for certain, I suspect that it is the same in Derry, Enniskillen or Newry.

In fact, the opportunity to create great civic spaces and great open spaces and to bring people together to enjoy the civic amenities and the great historical environs do not exist because, simply, the legislation does not reconnect. For example, the Highways Act 1980 puts barriers in place of the successful creation of a cafe culture, because it prevents the use of pavements. Although the draft tourism strategy, which spans from 2010 to 2020, welcomes the principle of a cafe culture and says that it would be great at a regional level, it does not identify any of the barriers that exist in other Departments that could prevent it coming into being. I welcome Mr Maskey's acknowledgement that the Department for Social Development (DSD) has made efforts to stimulate debate on the area. However, because of that Department's limited powers,

the regeneration policy falls well short of what is needed to fulfil the opportunity for the establishment of a genuine cafe culture.

At the weekend, I visited Galway to spend some time with colleagues in the Labour Party. On Saturday afternoon, we left our conference for an hour or two to enjoy the summer sun. The walk along Shop Street was a truly wonderful experience. It was bunged; there is no other word for it. People were sitting outside every shop, cafe and pub enjoying the atmosphere, the craic and the weather in a city that all of us cannot help but feel a huge affinity towards. We could have the same. However, for that to happen, our Executive need to change the way that they do business. I welcome the motion and, even if it does nothing other than stimulate that point and begin to question all our parties about how we do business together and how we approach problems that do not fall neatly to specific Departments, it will have been worthwhile.

Mr McCarthy: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I speak on behalf of the Alliance Party to support every effort to encourage and expand our tourism industry, including, of course, the hospitality industry.

Northern Ireland has a wonderful opportunity to increase the visitor footfall in every part of the region, and we must seize every chance to encourage visitors from all over the world. The motion puts forward ideas that could enable Northern Ireland to catch up — I stress the words “catch up” — with other areas.

It is unfortunate that we do not have long periods of sunshine, but that is no reason to do nothing. Indeed, I understand that a cafe culture is enjoyed in some European countries that have even harsher weather than we do. Some establishments in those countries provide heaters on the pavements outside their properties in wintertime, thus offering visitors continued enjoyment outside. If we are serious about catching up with other areas, a cafe culture must be available seven days a week. There must also be an opportunity to enjoy a beer or whatever outside in a controlled manner. As a teetotaler, I do not mind anyone having a beer outside on a Saturday or Sunday.

We must be serious about competing with cities, towns and villages across the water and in the Republic. Tourists who come here are astonished at the lack of facilities that are available and open for business, particularly

on a Sunday. Our comrade Conall McDevitt mentioned his own experience, which is also relevant. As I listened to the wireless on my way into work this morning, I heard an American visitor who was caught up in the current air disruptions complain bitterly about having had nothing to do in our capital city of Belfast yesterday. We have many lessons to learn.

To achieve the goal of having a cafe culture in Northern Ireland, we need new legislation on licensed premises and their environs. Members have already mentioned that, and it is outlined in the motion. I understand that planning permission, or at least approval from Roads Service, would be required to site chairs and tables on public footpaths. The last thing that we want is footpaths being restricted by any obstacle that inhibits the free passage of prams, wheelchairs and the general public. There is much to do to promote our tourism potential. As Mr Shannon said, the Strangford constituency, for example, has everything to offer as regards tourism. I fully support the motion.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Tá mé ag labhairt le tacaíocht a thabhairt don mholadh. Ba mhaith liom fosta mo bhuíochas a ghabháil le Paul Maskey agus le Barry McElduff as ucht an moladh a thabhairt os comhair an Tionóil inniu. I thank Paul Maskey and Barry McElduff for tabling this important motion, which will be welcomed by those in the cafe and restaurant industries, the hospitality industry as a whole and, indeed, other tourism and retail outlets in city centres.

As Members pointed out and is evidenced in Members' information packs, the de facto situation is that many of our coffee shops already have outside sitting areas that are well used and are of great benefit to the owners of the premises and the trade in the surrounding area. Unfortunately, as regards the exact legal position, outstanding issues such as liability and access to premises have still to be resolved. Some cafe and restaurant owners have gone ahead and created the de facto situation. However, others have not done so because of their pressing concerns, and they do not want the hassle of having to confront or deal with issues such as access and liability.

As has also been pointed out, a number of Departments including DRD, DSD and DOE have a role to play in resolving the matter.

Departments should recognise what is said in the debate and come together to do that. The memorandum of understanding contained in our information packs provides the basis for discussion and, perhaps, legislation. Conall McDevitt described the situation in Galway, and anyone who has visited Galway will understand what he meant. The legislation and regulation is there, so it may not be hard to lift it and translate it to here.

Most importantly, many in the industry believe that it will not take a huge amount of work to facilitate a move forward. They feel frustrated; where a number of Departments are involved, progress can be slow and cumbersome and difficulties are not resolved as quickly as they could be.

1.15 pm

The owners of premises are clear that outside access increases their trade. Examples of other cities are cited. People in Derry point to the experience of Galway, and even Belfast, as examples of how cities can be improved. I know that a number of cafes in the centre of Derry are attached to large shopping malls and therefore have access to space outside the premises. The cafe owner will tell you that that is an added benefit of the location. Regulations protect his cafe, so he does not have to worry about that aspect. Even in enclosed malls, it is obvious that cafes with outside access enjoy an enhanced trade because people see the cafe and use it much more often.

For a trader, that is important. Ensuring that customers know that the premises are there is a big part of bringing them into the premises. Owners of small restaurants and cafes do not have large advertising budgets, so they need people to see their premises, and having outside facilities allows them to be seen. If Jim Shannon ever retires from politics, I have absolutely no doubt that he will get a job in PR. I have heard of Tourism Ireland, but Tourism Strangford seems to have sprung up this morning.

The issue is important. Last Tuesday in Parliament Buildings, the six Foyle MLAs, representing parties across the board, met traders with premises in the centre of Derry. The meeting was not restricted to owners of cafes and restaurants, but included other traders. They pointed out that, increasingly, city centres are becoming less attractive to retail traders and small businesses. That trend may be seen in many

towns and cities throughout Ireland. They told us what they required for their trades, and they talked about the bigger issues such as rates and out-of-town shopping.

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

Mr McCartney: Sin é. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle.

It falls to me to make the winding-up speech. Someone rather unkindly asked Paul Maskey earlier whether this debate could be characterised as 'Tiocfaidh ár latte'. I thought that that was unusual.

All Members have entered into the spirit of the debate. It is a very positive motion that is aimed at regenerating town and city centres. Paul Maskey has highlighted the anomaly of cafes or restaurants receiving recognition or awards one morning and being told by a government Department to remove the outside seating that afternoon. Paul drew attention to best practice in other parts of Europe. He said that the motion was not about extending drinking hours, which would throw up community safety concerns and others about binge drinking. He emphasised that it is about facilitating customers who want to eat food outdoors in a pleasant environment. He mentioned Belfast, Derry and Omagh. I was glad to hear him mention Omagh, because, like every other Member, I represent a constituency. If there was a competition for Members' speedy reference to their constituencies, Jim Shannon would definitely win. It is like the competition for the fastest goal of the season. Jim reaches Strangford in seconds: he does not take minutes.

This issue is all about legislation and joint working, as Paul Maskey reminded us, not least between the Department for Social Development, the Department for Regional Development, the Department of the Environment and local government. He also mentioned that Sunday opening hours were unduly restrictive in cities such as Belfast.

Like other Members, including Kieran McCarthy, he mentioned that no one would want to restrict access for people with disabilities or visual impairment and parents with prams or buggies, and, therefore, the legislation would need to take that into account.

Jim Shannon, who spoke next, reached Newtownards in record time. At one point he talked about tea shops, although I was not sure whether he said "Taoiseach" or "tea shops".

Mr Shannon: "Tea shops" would be right, Barry.

Mr McElduff: I know. In a Hansard Report from Westminster from about 100 years ago, or perhaps less, a reference to a meeting with the "Taoiseach" in Dublin was wrongly recorded as meeting in a "tea shop" in Dublin. That is why I was confused when Jim talked about tea shops.

Raymond McCartney was right to say that tourism needs champions and ambassadors, and Jim Shannon is definitely one of those. However, he could have tabled a motion for an Adjournment debate called "the promotion of tourism and visitor attractions in Strangford" and that would have fitted the bill too.

John McCallister had an early spat with Jim Shannon when he claimed ownership of Strangford town. He emphasised that tourism is a major growth area, and he reminded us about DRD's responsibility to maintain and control the use of pavements. He was concerned about the wording of the motion because he, too, was worried about the problem that has been experienced in England and Wales with extended licensing hours. Paul Maskey intervened to remind the House that that is not what the motion is about; it is essentially about traders making use of the front of their premises and allowing people to take and consume food outdoors. Hardly anyone mentioned that the weather in this part of the world is not terribly clement for that sort of thing, but we all make do with what we have.

Conall McDevitt welcomed the motion and said that he felt that it would help to stimulate wider debate in the Assembly and the Executive on issues that do not fit neatly into one Department or where it is not obvious that one Department is responsible. He said that the debate served to remind us of the disconnection in our government system and that the planning system should be about enabling economic development and regeneration. He talked about a civic culture and his recent experience of the atmosphere, weather and craic in Galway, which was certainly enhanced by the opportunity to consume food outdoors, as he witnessed at the weekend. He bemoaned the fact that Sunday morning in Belfast can be rather ghostly, with nowhere for people to eat or sit outdoors. He

explained that legislative hurdles exist, that there are barriers in many Departments and that, therefore, considerable joint working will be necessary.

Kieran McCarthy acknowledged that there is great scope for us to catch up. He said that a cafe culture is not totally weather dependent and that people can come up with ways and means of making it appealing, even in inclement weather. He seemed to catch Cathal Boylan's attention when he mentioned a beer. I felt that Cathal was distracted at that point. His ears pricked up when you mentioned a beer, and he said, albeit from a sedentary position, "Now you're talking."

Mr Boylan: Only if he is buying, Barry.

Mr McElduff: He is hoping that you are buying, Kieran.

Mr McCarthy: No chance.

Mr McElduff: OK. Kieran McCarthy reminded the House that we are talking about putting chairs on public footpaths and people's freedom of movement must not be restricted. That reminded me of a debate that took place in Omagh about street furniture and how, for example, users of the Blind Centre made a vital contribution to the consultation. They made sure that their voices were heard in the debate on what street furniture would be installed in Omagh town.

As I have just mentioned my county town, I want to praise the private sector for its involvement in stimulating the development and regeneration of Main Street in Omagh. Essentially, the main thoroughfares in Omagh are High Street and Market Street. However, a new street called Main Street has been created.

Mr McCartney: It would be interesting to see who would win: Barry McElduff racing to Omagh or Jim Shannon to Newtownards?

Mr McElduff: I thank Raymond for that; he is very helpful, as always.

Main Street in Omagh is an enclosed space but, again, it has the ambience that we are trying to create in our city and town centres. Raymond McCartney referred to the memorandum of understanding. He said that it is not rocket science and that there are examples of best practice that could be used here. However, such examples would have to be amended to suit the

particular circumstances of Belfast, Derry, other towns, or Newtownards for that matter.

Raymond McCartney also said that, because the creation of cafe culture society would involve a number of Departments, the process tends to be slow and cumbersome. Like other Members, he referred to the fact that there has been a lot of exploration of the issue, and that it is now time to move towards legislation. He said that, as a number of cafes in Derry are attached to shopping malls, an atmosphere has already been created. He mentioned the fact that it is increasingly difficult to get people to visit city centres because of the existence of out-of-town shopping facilities. Therefore, the creation of a cafe culture society would obviously help in that battle. Raymond went on to say that owners of small and medium-sized cafes and restaurants do not have large marketing budgets. Therefore, the creation of such a society would also enhance their ability to compete in business.

I thank all Members who contributed to the debate. I would like the motion to be resolved with unanimous support.

Mr Deputy Speaker: We cannot put the Question because we do not have a quorum.

Notice taken that 10 Members were not present.

House counted, and there being fewer than 10 Members present, the Deputy Speaker ordered the Division Bells to be rung.

Upon 10 Members being present —

Mr Deputy Speaker: I thank Mr Kennedy. We now have a quorum.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

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.

Private Members' Business

St Patrick's Day

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

Mr McCarthy: I beg to move

That this Assembly calls on the Secretary of State to proclaim St Patrick's Day a full and permanent public holiday in Northern Ireland to help boost tourism and the local economy.

Once again, I am delighted to have the opportunity to seek the consensus and, hopefully, the support of the Northern Ireland Assembly to put the request to the Secretary of State to have St Patrick's Day — 17 March — proclaimed a public holiday for everyone in Northern Ireland.

It is now more than 10 years since I stood in this very spot and proposed a similar motion, to which an amendment was tabled. The then Assembly agreed to call on Her Majesty's Government to proclaim St Patrick's Day a public holiday. Unfortunately, that has not happened. Let us hope that the incoming Secretary of State, whoever it is, takes a more positive attitude to the decisions of the Assembly and acts accordingly —

Mr Kennedy: It could be me.

Mr McCarthy: It could be you.

I thank Research and Library Service for preparing the information packs for the debate. It is most interesting to look back on the proceedings of 7 February 2000 and read what Members had to say. It is 10 years on and, thankfully, there is now more maturity, and a lot of political progress has been made. Indeed, there has been a lot of coming together for the common good and recognition of issues that we all agree on. Certainly, many things were said 10 years ago that quite possibly pertain today. However, something that was agreed in 2000 and remains the same is that St Patrick brought a message to this country, and we should build on that to share in the heritage that is good, positive and recognised throughout the world.

1.30 pm

My motion emphasises the potential for tourism and the local economy by making St Patrick's Day a public holiday for everyone. To capitalise on that, many material issues need to be considered and put into practice. Indeed, the previous motion would, if and when implemented, contribute in a positive and beneficial way to encourage visitors and locals alike to come to these shores and experience the warmth, culture, music and arts etc, all of which have the potential to expand our economic opportunities considerably. St Patrick's Day is celebrated on every continent, and such potential must be exploited to the full in Northern Ireland.

There is an anomaly that we wish to see addressed. St Patrick's Day is a bank holiday, but not everyone works in a bank, the Civil Service or, indeed, the Northern Ireland Assembly. The Secretary of State could take the necessary steps to secure the holiday for everyone, and we hope that he will do so. The Assembly and Executive have given their commitment to pursue a shared and better future for the people of Northern Ireland. A perfect opportunity for that exists through all our citizens being able to attend, and join in with, community activities to celebrate our patron saint on 17 March. At present, many schools do not enjoy those festivities, and I am certain that they would value the opportunity to join in. It is also interesting to note the many changes and advances since our last debate on the subject, including St Patrick's Trail, which is well organised and signposted. It has, and will undoubtedly, bring tourists to our shores all year round.

The business section of the 'Belfast Telegraph' of 16 March 2010 showed how the hospitality industry is cashing in on the potential of St Patrick's Day. It states that Downpatrick's:

"week-long St Patrick's Festival pulls in 35,000 visitors and generates £1m for the Down district".

Such opportunities could be replicated around Northern Ireland. The same article mentions a local bakery having a 15% growth in sales over the St Patrick's Day period.

I hope that Members support the motion, that the Secretary of State acknowledges the voice of local people and takes the necessary steps to fulfil the wishes of the people of Northern Ireland, and that we do not have to wait another 10 years for action on this important matter.

Mr Leonard: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I support the motion. I agree with the previous Member and hope that it will not be another number of years before a decision is made and the matter moved forward.

We all know the ebbs and flows in how St Patrick's Day has been viewed throughout Ireland as a whole. In the North, things have obviously been quite different in recent decades, although there has been some improvement. There have also been various efforts to claim ownership of St Patrick. Most were based on the well-practised routine of reading history backwards, a practice that has gone on in this Chamber and in local council chambers. That was the negative side of how things were. There was some polarisation, although I would not call it deep polarisation.

I remember a case in which parents took two of their children out of a school that did not close for St Patrick's Day. They went to the festivities and next day gave the brothers little notes for their respective teachers explaining that they were off school the previous day because they had gone to enjoy the St Patrick's Day celebrations.

The teacher referred to them by name — for convenience, I shall call them “the Smiths” — saying that, yesterday, the Smiths were away at a republican gathering. The young fellas felt under pressure because no one else had been to such a gathering.

That is the sort of negative thing that happened in the past, but we are in a new, evolving and positive era. We are where we are, and although it would also have been opportune to do so all those years ago, we must take the positivity forward by upping our game to ensure that St Patrick's Day becomes a public holiday — not merely a bank holiday — bringing commonality with other regions on the island.

To pick up on the commonality theme, another parallel across the island is the schools' cup rugby final, which many northerners associate with St Patrick's Day. They might think of that as a grand but isolated sporting occasion; however, on St Patrick's Day, similar sporting occasions take place throughout Ireland. That has been a tradition for many years. Throughout Ireland on St Patrick's Day, rugby and Gaelic — hurling and football — finals take place. Such commonality has existed for many years, and those occasions have been enjoyed by people the length and breadth of the island.

Such commonality would be complemented by the measure that we are discussing today, which would enable all the Provinces to get involved in the various events that take place throughout the island. Let us look to the whole island and endorse the making of St Patrick's Day a public holiday, because it would be a major step forward. Without taking sides or favouring one tradition over another, it would be a great sign of civic commonality for all people, not just those who get a bank holiday. Everyone should enjoy the benefits of a public holiday on 17 March.

Supporting this straightforward step today would enable those who look on the religious heritage of the day to enjoy it while the sporting occasions and other events that are scheduled for St Patrick's Day would be open to all to take part in or view. At some stage in the future, I can even imagine an annual rota for each of the four Provinces, with people from each one attending events and coming together to celebrate symbolically the national day.

Tourism is at the core of the motion, and the freedom that a public holiday would give us would promote that tourism. For once, tourism on the island of Ireland should benefit from the potential that major St Patrick's Day celebrations enjoy elsewhere. Why should Ireland, north, south, east and west, not be part of that?

Mr Kennedy: I welcome and support the motion to make St Patrick's Day a public holiday. In the past, when the proposal was debated in the Chamber, it received widespread political support, and it is a matter of regret that no action has been taken to upgrade the bank holiday to a full public holiday. Everyone should be able to honour St Patrick, who, it is important to remember, did not bring religion to Ireland; he brought Christianity, which is a different matter entirely.

The motion affords us an opportunity to honour St Patrick's reputation properly and to restore it, because, unfortunately and for whatever reason, in the past, certain people sought to make St Patrick a card-carrying member of some republican group.

Mr K Robinson: Does the Member agree that one of the most positive signs over recent years, and one that continues today, is that the Orange Order in Ballymena honours St Patrick by way of a parade? In the past, when St Patrick's Day fell on a suitable day, Orangemen in Belfast were proud to walk wearing their collarettes and the shamrock at the same time.

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

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for drawing to our attention that important and welcome aspect of St Patrick's Day, which, like the custom of presenting shamrock to British Army regiments of the line, in the past, some people have chosen to overlook or even deny. Those are important traditions that can be built upon.

There are opportunities for the tourism industry to better promote St Patrick's Day. Many of our councils have gone to considerable trouble to try to make parades more inclusive. Down District Council has made great strides in making its parade open and accessible to all sections of the community. Unfortunately, that has not been replicated in other districts, but we look forward to further progress being made.

It is particularly important that schoolchildren throughout our education system have the opportunity to learn more about St Patrick and appreciate the huge contribution that he and others made to bringing Christianity here. Making St Patrick's Day a school and public holiday would be an important step in that direction. That raises the wider issue of how public and bank holidays are currently spread across the year.

It strikes me as very odd that the year's principal religious festival, Easter, is over before anyone can be given a public or a bank holiday. Admittedly, the banks and some government offices close on Good Friday, but, it is my view that Good Friday should be a full public holiday. It is a bizarre notion that something called Easter Tuesday — without any historical link or rationale — is simply given as a holiday in conjunction with Easter Monday, because those days begin the working week and thus mark the religious festival of Easter. That is an issue that needs to be addressed. The Assembly and the Executive can make a contribution locally by restoring St Patrick's Day as a public holiday and looking again at the present public holidays to see whether we can properly mark an important festival such as Easter with Good Friday as a day off.

Therefore, I broadly support the motion tabled by Mr McCarthy, who has doggedly pursued the issue of designating St Patrick's Day a public holiday. I wish him well.

Mr A Maginness: I thank Mr McCarthy for tabling his motion. He comes from County Down, which

is very much associated with the patron saint of Ireland, St Patrick. It is a measure of Members' political maturity that the motion is non-contentious and is supported by everybody in the Chamber. I welcome that as an important step, as, I am sure, does the motion's proposer.

My one regret is that we have to go to the Secretary of State to seek the creation of a public holiday on St Patrick's Day. That is a poor reflection on the Assembly's current powers. However, if the opinion of the House is united, I am sure that that request will be successful.

1.45 pm

Mr Leonard and other Members talked about the commonality of St Patrick to all traditions in Ireland, including Catholic, Protestant and those who have no particular religious tradition. All cultural and political traditions value St Patrick in a religious sense and, to some extent, in a secular sense. For many centuries, this island was regarded as one of saints and scholars, an isle of people who were dedicated to spirituality and learning. If we bear that in mind, St Patrick's Day could become an important focal point for all of us, no matter what our tradition. It could become something in which we could celebrate our identity, whether that be Catholic or Protestant, nationalist or unionist. It is a great tribute to St Patrick, who brought Christianity to this island, that people, no matter what their tradition or how diverse their views, regard him symbolically as the patron of this island.

As the proposer of the motion pointed out, there is tremendous value for tourism and the economy. However, St Patrick has even greater value in respect of bringing people together. In many ways, St Patrick is an exemplar of partnership on this island.

Mr K Robinson: I agree totally with the Member. However, does he agree that some of the scenes that we have witnessed on St Patrick's Day, particularly over recent years, do nothing to encourage the image that all of us in the Chamber wish to see and the potential that lies in the day?

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

Mr A Maginness: I think that the Member is referring to the rather bacchanalian scenes in the Holylands area of Belfast, which is a matter of great regret. That issue is being addressed by

the universities, the police, the civil authorities, Belfast City Council and others. It denigrates the celebration of St Patrick and what he stands for.

Ulster has a particular place in the life of St Patrick, because many of his works took place in Ulster. In particular, we recall his sojourn on Slemish as a slave. We also recall the fact that he is reputed to be buried in Downpatrick, County Down. There is a tremendous association between St Patrick and Ulster, which could be of great value in developing a tourist attraction for visitors to the North of Ireland. St Patrick's Trail is underdeveloped; it is important that we emphasise that because we are emphasising a cultural tourism that is attractive to those outside this island who genuinely see it as a focal point for spirituality and learning. If that can be developed, that is well and good.

Belfast has made considerable and significant strides to make the celebration of St Patrick a truly cross-community event. I hope that further efforts will be made in that direction. We are breaking through and creating a genuine non-sectarian celebration of St Patrick in Belfast. Let us hope that further work on that can develop. I support the motion.

Mr P Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. When one looks at the attendance in the Chamber today, one would think that this is a public holiday. People talk about abstentionist parties. Where are the DUP Members today? There were no SDLP Members present at the start of the debate. Maybe people who talk about abstentionism should look in the mirror and ask themselves if they too are abstentionists.

I thank Kieran McCarthy for bringing the motion to the Chamber today. I know that he has raised it with the Business Committee on many occasions, but it has finally been agreed and brought forward to the House today. So, fair play to you, Kieran, for sticking with it.

When one looks at St Patrick's Day celebrations around the world, one does not have to look any further than New York, where it takes somewhere in the region of seven hours for the parade to pass. Many people leave this island to go to New York and other places around the world to celebrate our patron saint, St Patrick. That is all well and good, but the motion talks about tourism, and it is very important that, at the very least, we create a public holiday here on St Patrick's Day. Someone mentioned that it

is a shame that we have to call on the Secretary of State to achieve that. Sinn Féin wants to see more powers devolved from Britain so that we can make such decisions in this Chamber. If we were able to do so, with the support of all the parties, things would happen sooner rather than later. We should use this debate to make that happen sooner. Therefore, we want more powers to be devolved please.

There is confusion, because some schools are closed and some are not, some businesses are closed and some are not, and people are asking how they can plan for the future. In recent years, I have been a regular attendee at the Belfast parade, and, when I was a councillor on Belfast City Council, I and my party colleagues fought very hard to ensure that Belfast recognised St Patrick's Day and put some funding towards the parade that is now a yearly event in Belfast city centre. That is a step in the right direction. For too long, people sectarianised St Patrick when they voted against the parade in Belfast city centre. It is a good sign that, when it comes to the patron saint, sectarianism is reducing. If the motion is passed, and if St Patrick's Day becomes a public holiday, that will, hopefully, reduce the sectarian aspect, because everyone will be able to enjoy it.

Some Members mentioned the events that have taken place in the Holylands in recent years. Universities do not have any right, at this stage, to have a public holiday, but, if it were a public holiday, I am sure that a lot of people would go back to where they live rather than staying in places such as the Holylands. That might reduce the numbers of people —

Mr K Robinson: Does the Member realise that his colleague Mr McElduff, who is sitting at the far end, would have to wrestle with all those problems if students were to go back home?

Mr P Maskey: I do not think that there would be any better man than Barry McElduff to deal with some of those issues, because he is a very hard-working constituency member. Mr McElduff and the rest of the Sinn Féin MLAs would prove to be very effective on that issue. Thank you for pointing that out.

It is a very important issue for tourism. Let Northern Ireland have the best tourism product. St Patrick is buried near the constituency of the Member who tabled the motion. Let us promote St Patrick's Day, and let us bring thousands of people from America, England and elsewhere

around the world here to celebrate the patron saint's day and spend money here instead of elsewhere. People fly all over the world to celebrate St Patrick's Day. Let them stay locally, and let us move forward in the right direction to ensure that we, and the tourism infrastructure here, can benefit greatly.

As was said in the previous debate on the creation of a cafe culture, such developments can create more employment opportunities. People in businesses are crying out for more such activity; it is about product development, and that is exactly what we need to do.

St Patrick is the patron saint and many people worship him, but it is important to say that he is also part of the tourism product. I thank Kieran for bringing the motion to the House. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr Neeson: I did not expect to be called so soon to make my winding-up speech. Like other Members, I thank Kieran McCarthy for bringing forward the motion; I also thank Research and Library Services for their research on it. Interestingly, their paper includes the Hansard report of the previous debate on the issue in 2000. It is interesting to note that half those who voted on that occasion are no longer Members. That debate was quite acrimonious, but, hopefully, we are moving forward and are being seen to be moving forward and providing leadership to the community.

Mr A Maginness: I recall that debate. Fortunately, I am in the half that is still in the House. I recall that Dr Paisley came out in support of the motion, whereas some of his colleagues, notably Mr Sammy Wilson, who had spoken before Dr Paisley, did not. Following Sammy Wilson's contribution, Dr Paisley came in and, much to Mr Wilson's embarrassment, said that he agreed with the motion.

Mr Neeson: As Sammy Wilson is my MP I will have a word in his ear to try to persuade him. He is looking for votes at the moment, but, unfortunately, I cannot promise him mine.

Every year, numerous politicians trip off to the United States and to the White House. Why not invite President Obama to come here for next year's St Patrick's Day? That would be a significant step forward.

There is general recognition that St Patrick's Day should be a public holiday. I will quote from the

comment column of the 'Belfast Telegraph' from St Patrick's Day 2009, which was included in the report by Research and Library Services. It said:

"Finding a common way to celebrate St Patrick would be another step towards normality and better community relations. The power sharing Executive and Assembly should start preparing the ground for next year by devising plans for bigger and more inclusive festivities throughout Northern Ireland on March 17. They should build on what is already happening in cities and towns like Newry, Belfast, Downpatrick, Londonderry and Armagh. And the politicians could give the celebrations a real boost by declaring St Patrick's Day a public holiday. Now that would be an added reason to party."

That editorial reflects the feelings of most people.

Members referred to the fact that some schools are closed and some open. If we are to make St Patrick's Day a cross-community event, we need to look at schools' policy for St Patrick's Day.

Billy Leonard, rightly, spoke about civic commonality. Danny Kennedy said that he regretted that action had not been taken so far and that all schoolchildren should be given more opportunity to learn about St Patrick. Alban Maginness is correct that the motion is not contentious. He regrets that we have to ask the Secretary of State to proclaim St Patrick's Day a public holiday. Paul Maskey referred to that as well. Alban Maginness also said that St Patrick can bring people together. Paul Maskey reflected on the low attendance in the Chamber for the debate. I agree with him. It is disappointing that there are not more Members here.

2.00 pm

I look forward to a unanimous vote in support of the motion. We, as an elected Assembly, should not hold back and should go to the Secretary of State now to ask that St Patrick's Day 2011 be made a public holiday, so that preparations can be made for that. Once again, I thank Kieran for bringing the motion forward. I hope that the vote is unanimous.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly calls on the Secretary of State to proclaim St Patrick's Day a full and permanent public holiday in Northern Ireland to help boost tourism and the local economy.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The next item of business is Question Time. I propose, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until 2.30 pm. The sitting is, by leave, suspended.

The sitting was suspended at 2.01 pm.

2.30 pm

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

Oral Answers to Questions

Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Mr Speaker: I give Members advance warning that Mr McCann is not in his place to ask question 1, and question 9 has been withdrawn. It is useful to give Members advance notice, especially of questions that have been withdrawn.

Mephedrone

2. **Mr McDevitt** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what steps he is taking to regulate the supply of mephedrone, in light of the increased use of and deaths from consumption of the drug. (AQO 1049/10)

3. **Mr Hilditch** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the dangers of mephedrone and the need for this substance to be banned. (AQO 1050/10)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Mr McGimpsey): With your permission, Mr Speaker, I will answer questions 2 and 3 together.

Following recent reports of the availability of mephedrone and emerging evidence of its harms in Northern Ireland, I wrote to the chairperson of the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs (ACMD) and the Home Secretary asking them to take forward the issue as a matter of urgency. I also spoke directly to the Home Secretary on the matter. On 29 March 2010, the ACMD recommended that mephedrone and all generic cathinones should be classified as class B drugs. The Home Secretary has accepted this recommendation, and mephedrone became illegal to possess or supply on 16 April 2010. In addition, its importation was banned on 29 March 2010.

Mr Speaker: Before I call Mr McDevitt to ask a supplementary question, did the Minister intend to group questions 2, 3 and 15?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I beg your pardon. Yes, I intended to group questions 2, 3 and 15.

Question 15 was as follows:

15. **Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action he is taking in relation to mephedrone. (AQO 1062/10)

Mr McDevitt: I thank the Minister for his reply, and I welcome the decisions that he mentioned. However, does he agree that it is time to review the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 and, in particular, to review the principle at the heart of that Act: that we have to wait for a drug to be proven to be dangerous before it can be withdrawn? That is anomalous and contrary to the procedure used for commercial drugs, which are assumed to be dangerous until they are approved. Does the Minister agree that we should call on the British Government to review the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 at a regional level?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I have done exactly that. In my conversations and correspondence with Alan Johnson, I suggested a new class D for dangerous drugs. Mr McDevitt is quite right: it is long past time to update the 1971 Act. As a drug emerges, it is tested to determine whether it should be legal or illegal. Drugs are coming forward swiftly. BZP was made illegal at Christmas. Mephedrone emerged at exactly the same time, and it is now illegal, along with the generic group. However, there is no doubt that the next drug is coming down the line as we speak. Therefore, the proper approach is that the next drug should be classified as illegal and then proved to be harmless and beneficial and allowed in due course. It should be the reverse of what is happening now.

Mr Hilditch: I thank the Minister for his answer and the work that he and his Department have done recently on this serious matter. On the back of a packed public meeting in Carrickfergus last Thursday night, I ask what support is now available for families and victims. Is there any increased support, particularly as the Minister has alluded to the new drug NRG-1, which is coming out, and as MDAI is already on websites?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I will write to Mr Hilditch in more detail. A wide range of support is available,

and that information is published on the Public Health Agency's fact file, which began with mephedrone on 5 February 2010. We also have the national drugs helpline and a range of local services, such as FASA, ASCERT and the Dunlewey Substance Advice Centre for those who are concerned about the harm that drugs can cause. The Lifeline helpline on 0808 808 8000 deals with self-harm and suicide, and it will signal and counsel the next step to access services. The whole health and social care family is also on alert so that people can present at GP surgeries. However, I am happy to write to the Member with further information.

Mr Weir: I thank the Minister for his response and for the actions that he has taken. What liaison has there been between the Minister and either the Department of Health in England or the Department of Justice here on replacement drugs for mephedrone? My understanding is that new drugs have already taken the place of mephedrone on the streets and are being sold at a cheap rate, which is placing our young people in great danger.

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Even though we have established the Department of Justice in Northern Ireland, making drugs illegal remains a reserved matter that falls within the remit and authority of the Home Secretary, who is advised by the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs. However, as I said in my answer to Mr McDevitt, a way forward could lie in short-circuiting the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971.

Through the British-Irish Council, representatives from England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic routinely participate in meetings in misuse of drugs sectoral format, which are held at least three times a year. That group plays an important role in liaising on drugs policy. The misuse of drugs is a common problem that we all face. The Home Secretary acted very quickly on mephedrone, but we need to short-circuit the process.

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I welcome the move to ban mephedrone. Does the Minister agree that we should examine the supply and demand issues of drugs in our communities? To do that, a multiagency approach is needed. Will the Minister confirm if he has carried out any multiagency work on illegal drugs?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Several issues are involved, including the supply issue, which we have already spoken about, the legislative issue, which I believe needs to be worked on, and the demand issue. They are very much the focus of the 'New Strategic Direction for Alcohol and Drugs (2006-2011)', which is a key strategy of my Department.

The Public Health Agency is also working with parents and professionals. It published a fact sheet on its website on 5 February 2010 that alerted the health and social care family to the problems of legal highs, and it is working with councils and locally elected representatives. The Department of Education is also issuing a letter to schools based on the information contained in that fact sheet.

The misuse of drugs is a societal problem and not one that either the Public Health Agency or the Department can solve individually. However, steps are being taken, and further meetings will be held involving the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, the Department of Education, the Public Health Agency and the new Department of Justice, under the auspices of the old Northern Ireland Office, to carry forward information on suppressing demand, dealing with supply, legislation and the further work that we are engaged in.

Mr Speaker: Question 3 has already been answered.

Families Matter

4. **Miss McIlveen** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the Families Matter strategy, particularly the involvement of health visitors and the Public Health Agency. (AQO 1051/10)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department established a strategic implementation group, which includes representatives from the Public Health Agency and health visitors, to prepare the initial Families Matter implementation plan for 2009-2011. That plan has now been finalised, and it sets out the initial priorities identified in the development of the strategy. It will be used to monitor, evaluate and review progress and to identify future areas for development. The

Regional Health and Social Care Board will lead on that implementation.

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Minister for his answer. Will he advise the House whether there are any proposals to introduce a pilot of family nurse partnerships in Northern Ireland and whether he will launch an action plan for the Families Matter strategy?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: As Miss McIlveen will be aware, I launched the Families Matter strategy in March 2009, following publication. It aims to assist parents to be confident and responsible in helping their children, working in conjunction with children's services and planning in the Regional Health and Social Care Board. I have invested moneys in that area.

The other part of the work that the Department is carrying out is the Healthier Future strategy, which is being led by the Public Health Agency. That strategy focuses particularly on the work of health visitors and nurses to ensure that children in care and in need get the services that they require. That work is ongoing, and it ensures that the universal services are identified for families of children in need and that that universal service is provided. We have a five-year plan to modernise health visiting and nursing.

Mr Gardiner: Will the Minister do everything possible to ensure that funding for public health projects will not be cut as a result of DUP/ Sinn Féin cuts to the health budget? Is it not the case that we should be investing in as opposed to cutting health funding? It is one Department that needs funding more than any other —

Mr Speaker: Order. I must remind the House and the Member that supplementary questions must relate to the original question. The Member's question goes outside the original question. I will allow the Minister to answer the question if he wishes to do so.

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: It is a pity that I did not get advanced warning, Mr Speaker. I agree with the Member, and I make no secret of the fact that I will continue to argue strongly for the need for funding for health, particularly in relation to Sinn Féin's claims. Yesterday, I listened to Gerry Kelly on television talking about "equality, equality, equality". The cuts are hitting health specifically, and the people who benefit most

from the Health Service are the elderly and the very young. What is equal about that?

The Member who was due to ask the first question for oral answer failed to turn up, but that question was on the new women and children's hospital at the Royal. That is needed, but the funding is not available. The DUP was alone in voting against the establishment of the Public Health Agency. That is another example of health not being a priority of the two parties that form the bulk of the Executive. That will be reflected on the doorsteps.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Will the Minister investigate a situation that has arisen in the Western Health and Social Care Trust area? Temporary respite services for families of children with disabilities and autism have been removed in the Omagh area. A residential facility will open in February 2011, but, between now and then, there is a gap in temporary respite services, which were making a difference to families of children with autism. Will the Minister look into that and give a commitment that summer schemes for those same families will be retained?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and

Public Safety: I am happy to give that commitment, provided that Mr McElduff gives a commitment to voting against the cuts to the health budget that are about to come forward. He is bound to understand that the resource that is available to fund the Health Service determines the activity that takes place. As he is aware, a new residential facility is opening in Omagh. I have also carried out an autism review and action plan, and considerable funding has been invested in that. It is pointless for Mr McElduff or any other Member to ask for services when the House is voting for cuts to the Health Service. A Health Service that is free at the point of delivery and is determined by need can work only if society is prepared to fund it. If society is not prepared to fund it, there will be consequences and gaps will appear all over the place.

Child Abuse

5. **Mr B McCrea** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on action he has taken regarding historical child abuse in Northern Ireland. (AQO 1052/10)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and

Public Safety: Historical child abuse is a

complex and sensitive issue, and any decision on the way forward is a matter for the Executive as a whole. Whatever course of action the Executive decide on, we must ensure that no victims are left behind and that all those who perpetrated abuse are investigated by the police and, where appropriate, are subject to the full rigours of the law. On 19 March 2010, I submitted a paper to the Executive that outlined the range of options for the way ahead.

2.45 pm

Mr B McCrea: I wish to ask the Minister about a letter that he wrote to the Minister of Education on 2 October 2009 seeking her views on a Ryan-style inquiry. I wish to know the Minister of Education's response to that letter. Is it the case that she replied saying that she had no policy considerations in that area? If so, will the Minister join me in expressing surprise that a Minister of Education would take such a position?

Mr Speaker: I urge the Member to come to his question.

Mr B McCrea: Will the Minister join me in expressing surprise that the Minister of Education took that view on such an emotive subject?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and

Public Safety: I was indeed surprised. On 2 October 2009, I wrote to OFMDFM — I copied in all Ministers — to highlight the issue of clerical abuse in the Republic of Ireland and its implications for Northern Ireland and to seek views about the way forward on a Ryan-style inquiry. Regrettably, the Minister of Education wrote to me on 23 December to express the view that her Department had no policy responsibility in that area. I wrote back to her on 3 February to highlight her Department's current and historical responsibilities. I was able to do that simply by looking at the Ryan report and at past and current legislation.

I received a further letter from the Minister of Education on 24 February that indicated that her officials were now looking at the Department's responsibilities and that they were to report to her by 30 April 2010. I took the view that the matter was too urgent to wait until that time. Therefore, I went to the Executive with my report, which set out a range of options on the way forward in addressing the issue of historical child abuse. I await with interest the Department of Education's input to that report.

It is an Executive matter and one that must be discussed with them.

Mrs M Bradley: Does the Minister believe that the Executive should apologise on behalf of the state to victims and survivors of institutional abuse?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: It would be wrong of me to pre-empt what the Executive's determination will be. That is a matter for the Executive as a whole, not the Department of Education, to consider. However, one of the options is that there should be an apology from the Executive. However, it is up to the Executive to determine in due course whether to do that.

Mrs Long: Given the timeline that the Minister outlined, what plans does he have to meet the Minister of Justice to discuss the issue? There will be considerable overlap between the two Departments and, indeed, a number of others on that issue.

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Executive will discuss and determine the best way forward and will look at the options available. The Member may wish to know that I have arranged to meet the Minister of Justice tomorrow.

Ms S Ramsey: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. You would think that there was an election going on, Mr Speaker. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Kennedy: Question.

Mr Speaker: Order.

Ms S Ramsey: Settle yourself, Danny. I am concerned that Basil may have been referring to an internal letter.

I welcome the Executive's commitment to try to take forward the issue of historical child abuse. Has the Minister had any discussions with the victims and survivors of historical child abuse about the proposed options?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: As far as discussions are concerned, my officials have, of course, considered the issues. At this stage, it is a matter for the Executive. Once the Executive have made a determination on the way forward, they will point the House in that direction. The Member asked whether I had met any of the victims. I have met victims over the past three

years. My officials are constantly meeting victims in various situations.

The issue is one that I feel merits urgent response, and it is one on which the Department of Education needs to be active. Laying aside the electoral side of things, perhaps Ms Ramsey could make that point to the Minister of Education.

Mr Bell: Given the high level of recidivism among paedophiles, will the Minister join me in calling for anybody with any information about any alleged paedophile activity to immediately bring that information to the police for proper investigation and, if necessary, investigation under the joint protocol procedures of social services to prevent there being any future victims?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: As I indicated in my answer, it is important that no victim be left behind. We should move urgently to address the pain and distress of victims and ensure that all those who perpetrated abuse are investigated and, where appropriate, subject to the full rigours of the law. That means that it is necessary for those with information to come forward.

Neonatal Nurses

6. **Ms Purvis** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how his Department will address the shortfall of 70 neonatal nurses, as identified in the Every Baby Matters report. (AQO 1053/10)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: In recent years, my Department has invested extensively in maternity and neonatal services. At each level of care, we strive to consistently meet the British Association of Perinatal Medicine standards for the ratio of neonatal nurses to cots. However, as in other parts of the UK, peaks and troughs in demand mean that that is not always possible. Northern Ireland has a strong record on stillbirth and neonatal mortality, and the most recent official figures available show that Northern Ireland is performing better than any other UK region. However, we do not see that as grounds for complacency and are always striving to improve services for mothers and babies. The figures quoted in the question are based on a report that is now a few years out of date. We are currently reviewing neonatal nurse staffing levels, and, when the results are available, I

will be in a position to make decisions on any further investment.

Ms Purvis: I thank the Minister for his answer and acknowledge that Northern Ireland leads the way in perinatal nursing. Given that that work takes place in a very specialised and highly demanding environment, what is the Minister doing to provide adequate support for the specialist nursing staff and midwives who work in that environment?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The key thing that I am doing is keeping up the recommended numbers. The Member asked about the shortfall of 70 neonatal nurses in accordance with the report to which the question refers. However, using the Bliss standard, there is a need for 277 neonatal nurses. I provide funding for 269 posts, and, therefore, we are not that far away from the recommended number. I am far from complacent and, indeed, have just launched a review of maternity services to match that. Further support comes, of course, from midwives who are skilled in this area. The ratio of midwives to births is 1:26, whilst the national recommended ratio is 1:28. Again, we are better than average. However, I am not complacent; hence the review.

The Member will be aware that there are three neonatal cot types. We meet the ratios in that area too. Indeed, through a business case, I am about to provide funding for a further three special care cots to be put into the system.

Mr McNarry: Will the Minister say whether the Wilson cuts, under which the Health Service budget is being slashed, are having a detrimental impact on issues such as this? Should the message be that, if you do not want to see the health budget cut, do not vote DUP?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Although I smile at the question, this is a very serious issue. The Health Service is not properly funded and is constantly being cut. Members voted for those cuts not once but twice, and they voted for £700 million in efficiency savings to be taken out of the Health Service budget.

We can see those cuts coming through. Those cuts will have and are having grave consequences for the Health Service. As a result, the Health Service is no longer in a

position to address need; instead, it addresses need according to the resources available.

Adoption Legislation

7. **Mr Brady** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the proposed new adoption legislation. (AQO 1054/10)

13. **Mr Beggs** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the paper submitted to the Executive on the adoption Bill. (AQO 1060/10)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: With your permission, Mr Speaker, I will answer questions 7 and 13 together.

In June 2009, a draft Executive paper was issued outlining proposals for the development of an adoption and children Bill. I recently received the final outstanding report from OFMDFM on that draft paper, some nine months after I issued it to my Executive colleagues in June 2009.

An adoption and children Bill was scheduled for 2010-11. However, I must now reconsider that legislative timetable and the possibility of progressing the Bill any further in light of the delay in the response to the draft Executive paper on the development of the Bill, other Assembly legislative and departmental priorities and the lifetime of the Assembly.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. The performance on adoption here is poor. Will the Minister provide some justification as to why the number of children adopted from care has fallen significantly on his watch?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: One of the key ways of addressing that problem is through a change in the legislation. I have had legislative proposals with the Executive since June last year. Those legislative proposals have stalled in OFMDFM, primarily in the office of the First Minister. That was the case until last week, when I was told that the First Minister was content to proceed with drafting the Bill subject to further scrutiny of the detail of the Bill, which should be brought back to the Executive. That stunned me, because it was no reason to hold up the proposals for nine months.

I was further stunned when the office of the deputy First Minister said that it was concerned that the draft paper did not clearly set out the policy proposals, because, along with all other Departments, I had always understood it to be content to go forward. That amazes me. The office of the deputy First Minister requested a further version of the paper clearly listing the policy proposals. I am stunned and astonished that the Bill was held up for so long, when the deputy First Minister and his party understand the need for it. Mr Brady clearly indicated that he understood the need for rapid action in that area. Despite that, we have had obfuscation and delay since June last year.

I am sitting with a 100-clause Bill. I have deliberately excluded the eligibility side, which would be more controversial, so that the Bill could be fast-tracked. I do not believe that I have any time left in the Assembly mandate to allow me to bring forward the legislation. It is a sad reflection on the House that I will have to abandon a Bill on such an important matter. I am looking at other measures that I can bring forward without legislation. However, the key way to make changes is through legislation, and organisations and interested parties on adoption will be scandalised by what has happened.

Mr Beggs: The Minister mentioned a nine-month delay. Does he agree that it is an absolute disgrace that there has been a nine-month delay, which will affect the lives and opportunities of many of the most disadvantaged children? Does he also agree that the way in which the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister has handled the issue has shown that the DUP and Sinn Féin are dysfunctional at the expense of our children?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I cannot disagree with that. *[Interruption.]* I know that Sinn Féin Members might find that funny, but let me explain some of the things that we are asking for in the Bill. We are asking for the introduction of the statutory principle that delay is likely to prejudice a child's welfare; a more child-centred adoption law to ensure that a child's welfare is paramount; the creation of a welfare checklist; the creation of a designated trust; the introduction of new pre-adoption and placement orders; and the putting of the adoption regional information system on a statutory basis.

In addition, I plan to introduce a special guardianship order to provide greater permanence for young people for whom adoption is not appropriate.

I am told that we cannot proceed with those initiatives because the deputy First Minister's officials say that the policy proposals have not been clearly set out. Moreover, the First Minister's officials say that they are now content for the work to proceed after nine or 10 months. That is not a matter for levity or for smiles and giggles from the Back Benches. We should all feel ashamed about that.

3.00 pm

Regional Development

Northern Ireland Water

1. Mr Gallagher asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the performance of NI Water. (AQO 1063/10)

The Minister for Regional Development (Mr Murphy): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Northern Ireland Water (NIW) extracts, treats and distributes approximately 614 million litres of drinking water every day to more than 800,000 homes and businesses. It collects, treats and returns safely to the environment over 134 million cubic metres of waste water every year on our behalf. That involves operating and maintaining around 1,100 water and waste water treatment works and more than 26,000 km of water mains and 14,000 km of sewers.

While maintaining that extensive infrastructure, the company has met or exceeded many of its key performance indicators during the past three years. For example, the quality of water from the tap is now higher than ever, and we have the highest levels of waste water quality ever. While improving quality, the company has made operating efficiencies of £44 million from the 2003-04 base.

NIW has successfully implemented a capital programme of more than 300 projects in the past three years, including the £160 million Belfast sewers project, which is the biggest project of its kind in the North and involves an upgrade of some 500 sewers and the construction of a 10 km storm tunnel with a 4 m diameter beneath the streets of Belfast.

The project was completed with minimum traffic and noise disruption and won a Considerate Constructors award: that is an example of how well NIW has performed. Other investment has resulted in improvements to the infrastructure and services throughout the region and has enabled us to meet our EU obligations. For example, nine sites that faced EU fines when I took up post are now compliant.

Of course, NIW has further to go in some areas. For example, improvements can be made to waste water leakage, supply interruptions and operating efficiency. There have also been some well-publicised governance issues. We need to continue to provide investment to enable NIW to deliver improvements. Moreover, we must avoid complacency about how funding is needed to keep our high levels of water quality and also be realistic. The independent review panel cautioned against spending money simply to match levels that water companies in England and Wales have achieved after 20 years of sustained investment. Through my social and environmental guidance for the next three years, the company has been given locally relevant targets that have been set by local stakeholders. As we move forward, intelligent regulation of NIW's performance will ensure that it continues to deliver improved services for customers and taxpayers across the North.

Mr Gallagher: I thank the Minister for highlighting some of Northern Ireland Water's noteworthy initiatives. However, I want to ask him about an initiative that he introduced in 2008: water charges for businesses and church and community properties. Is he aware that there is considerable chaos in that system and that, in some cases, wildly inaccurate bills have been levelled against customers —

Mr Speaker: The Member should ask a question.

Mr Gallagher: — followed by the threat of court proceedings? Is he aware that, when people follow up with enquiries, the staff are, in some cases, unhelpful and, in other cases, bad mannered? What does the Minister plan to do about that?

The Minister for Regional Development: I want to correct the Member's statement that I introduced those water charges. The Executive, including his party colleague, unanimously endorsed the introduction of the move to send bills to all non-domestic properties, including churches and charities. Therefore, the Member

should be corrected on his assumption. That initiative was not made singly by the Department for Regional Development but drew full support from all parties in the Executive.

I am aware of some performance issues. The Member's description of widespread chaos does not register with me, but I am aware of some instances when mistakes have been made. The highest standards are expected, and if, as he alleges, people have not been treated properly by NIW staff when they have challenged or questioned the extent of their bills, complaints can be made to the Consumer Council. Indeed, when anyone brings any such issues to my attention, my first response is to inform the chief executive of NIW and simultaneously inform the Consumer Council. Allegations of the type made by the Member constitute a complaint that the Consumer Council has a responsibility to examine. If the Member finds that the service is not satisfactory, I urge him to inform those bodies. However, if he wishes to bring individual instances to my attention, I will be happy to pass those on to the Consumer Council and NIW on his behalf.

Miss McIlveen: The Minister mentioned governance in his initial response. He will be aware that there have been press articles on the future governance of Northern Ireland Water. Is any work under way in the Department in relation to that? Does he plan to bring the matter to Executive colleagues and the Committee?

The Minister for Regional Development: As a consequence of very serious issues in NIW, I ended up dismissing a number of board members, which has obviously left a deficit in the governance of NIW. At that time, I wanted to examine future governance. The Member will know from her position on the Committee that NIW is being run almost as a hybrid of a Go-co and a non-departmental public body, with different responsibilities in different regards. That is not satisfactory going forward, so I want to use the opportunity of a hiatus in the company to examine all the options. When I reach a conclusion on the options, I will bring it to the attention of the Committee and, if necessary, to Executive colleagues as well.

Mr Leonard: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Will the Minister detail his approach for going forward since the procurement review at NIW?

The Minister for Regional Development: As I said in my previous answer, serious issues were brought forward as a result of the procurement. The matter merited being investigated and dealt with in public, and no attempt was made to hide either what happened or the investigation into those occurrences. That evidence was brought to my attention, and decisive action was and is being taken to address it. However, all that does not distract from the steady improvements that we have been making in delivering water and sewerage services, including the best-ever drinking water in the North, which I referred to in my original answer. Nonetheless, the instances that were brought to my attention are serious and merit immediate action. I will continue to keep the Committee and the House informed as we take measures going forward.

Mrs Long: Can the Minister reassure the House, particularly those of us who represent constituencies that have been affected by flooding in recent years, that the ongoing work to review governance structures will not impact in any way on Northern Ireland Water's ability to make rapid progress on infrastructural improvements that could prevent repeat occurrences and that it will be adequately and properly resourced and supported to do that?

The Minister for Regional Development: I can assure the Member that that is the case. My original answer highlighted the fact that, despite all the difficulties at management and governance level in NIW over the past number of years — there have been ongoing issues as well as the most recent one — it has still managed to achieve the set targets. NIW has created significant improvements and made significant investment. I am sure that the Member is familiar with the Belfast sewers project and many of the significant projects that have been completed in a timely fashion and within budget. Indeed, some of those projects won awards for the improvements that they brought about. That should provide some assurance that, despite the governance difficulties, the operation of the company has continued at a very high standard, which is what we expect.

I will continue to argue strongly for NIW to be given resources to allow it to carry out that very necessary work. The independent panel that I appointed when I first came into office confirmed that it needs continued investment. We are starting from a very low base: a lack of investment over 20 years. Investment needs to

continue to bring us up to the proper standards. All the sites that were on the brink of infraction proceedings from Europe are now compliant, which indicates that investment continues to be made and is working.

Mr Speaker: Before I call Tom Elliott, who is next on the list to ask a question, I give Members advance notice, in case they are sitting about waiting to ask a supplementary, that questions 3, 5 and 7 have been withdrawn.

A5: Protected Sites

2. **Mr Elliott** asked the Minister for Regional Development whether his Department has discussed, with the Northern Ireland Environment Agency, any potential damage to protected sites from the proposed A5 route. (AQO 1064/10)

The Minister for Regional Development: Roads Service and its consultants Mouchel have liaised with the NIEA regarding potential damage to protected sites throughout the duration of the A5 western transport corridor project. The NIEA provides regular updates to ensure that the mapping of protected sites, such as areas of special scientific interest, special areas of conservation and scheduled monuments and zones, is kept up to date. In addition, regular meetings are held at the agency to discuss the potential environmental risks associated with the project.

My Department has also engaged in consultation with NIEA about completion of the relevant habitats directive article 6 assessments on possible impacts on European sites, in accordance with the regulations. The purpose of discussions between DRD and NIEA is to ensure that any adverse impact of the scheme on protected sites is avoided or minimised and that mitigation works are conducted in accordance with established good practice. The general principle adopted by Roads Service has been to avoid protected sites; however, where that has not been possible, there is ongoing liaison with the NIEA on possible mitigation measures.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Minister for that round-up. Will he give me an indication of which environmentally sensitive sites are in the area of the proposed A5 route? I am particularly interested in ASSIs, special areas of conservation and other environmentally sensitive areas. Does the Minister accept

that, if the proposed route goes ahead, it will mean environmental destruction in that part of Northern Ireland?

The Minister for Regional Development: Some of the sites that may be affected are of scientific interest; others are of heritage interest. They include Castletown House, which is in a part of the Sperrin area of outstanding natural beauty; the River Foyle and Tributaries special area of conservation; Harry Avery's Castle, which is a scheduled monument; Tully Bog special area of conservation; Errigal Keerogue church and graveyard; and McKean's Moss area of special scientific interest. It is vital to ensure that, where the road passes through or affects those areas, particular attention is paid to it. That is why there is close liaison with NIEA, which provides strict guidelines on how those measures should be undertaken.

It is impossible to build a new road through open countryside without doing some environmental damage, but the onus is on the designers, developers and Roads Service to do so in a way that avoids, where possible, areas of particular environmental, scientific or heritage interest. Where it is impossible to do that, they must ensure that the highest standards are met to mitigate any adverse impact.

Lord Morrow: Does the Minister accept that the route of the A5 has become a most controversial subject? It creates more problems than it solves. Does he not accept that the line of the existing road is the proper route for the new road? If it were adopted, there would be little upheaval to the sites mentioned. The route that has been adopted causes tremendous hardship to farmers, and I ask the Minister to take a long, hard look at it.

The Minister for Regional Development: A long, hard look has been taken at all the routes suggested, including one that is largely unlined on the existing route. When one considers the number of access points, exits and entrances along the existing A5 that would have to be stopped up to create a high-grade dual carriageway, that route could have an even more significant impact on those living along it than the route through open countryside, which affects farms. A great deal of study has been done to find the best possible route; a preferred route has been identified, and further work is being done on it. Roads Service and the consultants, Mouchel, are discussing with

landowners how it will affect them and what mitigating circumstances can be put in place for them. Compensation has also been discussed. Environmental impact statements have to be produced, and a public inquiry will have to be held. If the Member or other Members want to challenge the decisions taken, that is the occasion on which to do so.

Mr P Ramsey: I thank the Minister for his response. The A5 is an important part of the infrastructure of the north-west. When does the Minister hope to conclude the land negotiations? Will consideration be given to farmers to whom, at present, environmental grants are given? Is that part of the negotiations?

3.15 pm

The Minister for Regional Development: Negotiations with individual landowners are ongoing. As I said, the purpose of the negotiations is to provide compensation in cases in which the road will have an impact on farms, to provide mitigation measures so that farmers can continue to use their land on either side of the road and to sort out access issues. Discussions are taking place with the people who own areas of particular environmental or heritage interest and with the Environment Agency and the Rivers Agency, particularly where the road will run close to the River Foyle and its tributaries. The intention is to conclude those discussions by the autumn, to publish environmental statements and to move towards holding a public inquiry at that stage.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. When will the environmental statement be published?

The Minister for Regional Development: The environmental statement will be published with the other draft statutory Orders in November of this year, and details of all environmental issues and the proposed mitigation measures will be included in that document.

Mr Speaker: I wish to give the House advance notice that questions 8 and 9 have been withdrawn.

Glen 10

4. **Mr P Maskey** asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline his Department's role in taking forward the Glen 10 development lands in west Belfast. (AQO 1066/10)

The Minister for Regional Development: I am aware that there are a number of master plans, proposals and initiatives for developments in west Belfast, including the Glen 10 Ard na Glinne site. Those are at different stages of development and are being laid by a number of Departments and lead organisations. As the regeneration of that area is a cross-cutting issue, I intend to bring a paper to the Executive to seek endorsement of an Executive-led approach to the regeneration of west Belfast, including the Shankill Road.

Mr P Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answer, because the Glen 10 Ard na Glinne site is an important site in west Belfast. I think that it covers a greater acreage than the Titanic Quarter, so it will be a very important development. We must get it right; otherwise, we will end up with a massive failure on our hands. Will the Minister assure the House that a co-ordinated approach will be taken to that west Belfast development?

The Minister for Regional Development: As I said, a number of plans and initiatives for west Belfast are at different stages of development. There are some very exciting potential developments, such as the transport hub at the Grosvenor Road, the developments at the Casement Park and Glen 10 sites, and the Andersonstown gateway project, all of which are at different stages. Such a wide range of initiatives means that our efforts can be diluted and we can waste scarce resources on overlapping studies and raise false expectations about our capacity to deliver results. As we face increasing pressure on our budgets, it is important that we show leadership in regenerating west Belfast and that we manage expectations by prioritising and delivering key projects.

We are showing Executive leadership on other regeneration initiatives, such as the work of Ilex and the development of the Titanic Quarter in east Belfast. The high levels of deprivation in west Belfast also warrant such leadership. Owing to the number of possible approaches, as I said, I will present a paper to the Executive that will propose the establishment of a ministerial subgroup to achieve a co-ordinated approach.

Mr Attwood: I agree with the Minister's view that leadership is required in the regeneration of west Belfast. However, while we and west

Belfast wait for that paper to be sent to the Executive, does he not welcome the co-ordinating group for the Glen 10 project that the Minister for Social Development set up? Does he not welcome the fact that the Minister for Social Development has already given approval for the development of 144 houses on the site of the former Bass brewery? Does he not think that it is time that his Department took up Margaret Ritchie's warm invitation to join that co-ordinating group in order to maximise everybody's efforts for that part of west Belfast? Is it not time for him to take such action as she has demonstrated?

Mr Speaker: I encourage the Member to ask his question.

Mr Attwood: The Minister's Department should not wait any longer to join her in progressing the Glen 10 proposals.

The Minister for Regional Development: I welcome the development of the Glen 10 site. It is important for Belfast, and, as my colleague Paul Maskey said, it may cover a greater acreage than the Titanic Quarter site. However, senior cross-departmental groups examined the development of the Titanic Quarter. That was certainly the case under direct rule. However, middle management-level officials are overseeing the Glen 10 development. I have not been warmly invited to participate in the group. A middle-level official from my Department has been warmly invited to participate in the group, and that is my concern. I raised that concern with Mr Attwood's colleague the Minister for Social Development. I invited her to establish a cross-departmental ministerial subgroup, which she could lead, if she wishes. However, that offer was spurned. As a consequence, I feel that I need to ask the Executive to consider the matter. There is such significant potential across west Belfast, and it would be a shame if — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

The Minister for Regional Development: It would be a shame if the Executive were to miss the opportunities that exist. A co-ordinated approach is required, because, as I said, as well as the Glen 10 site, there is the Casement Park development, the proposal for a rapid transit system through west Belfast, the regional transport hub at the Grosvenor Road and the Andersonstown gateway. There is a need to ensure that all the proposals complement one

another and move forward together. There are other development proposals; I have simply listed some. Rather than having a group of officials from middle management dealing on an ad hoc or piecemeal basis with Glen 10 and a different group dealing with another proposal for west Belfast, proper intervention at a senior level is required. Whoever takes the lead on the issue, proper intervention at ministerial level is required to ensure that the maximum potential is delivered to west Belfast. I am sure that the Member would welcome that.

Mr Speaker: Question 5 has been withdrawn.

Community Transport Association

6. **Mrs M Bradley** asked the Minister for Regional Development if he has any plans to extend the remit of the Community Transport Association. (AQO 1068/10)

The Minister for Regional Development: I have no plans to extend the remit of the Community Transport Association (CTA). However, I value the help that the CTA gives to the community transport sector. My Department continues to support the CTA, including through grant funding, and it will work closely with the association in implementing departmental transport plans.

Mrs M Bradley: Does the Minister not believe that the Community Transport Association deserves to have a role in the reform of public transport, which is what the public expect?

The Minister for Regional Development: A wide range of groups has been consulted and engaged in discussions about the reform of public transport. We want to ensure that we get public transport correct, properly linked up and integrated to make it even more accessible and get more people using it. That is essentially the purpose of the reform of public transport. A huge range of stakeholders is involved, and the Community Transport Association is an important part of that. A range of other groups is involved in transport initiatives, including representatives of disabled people and people from rural areas. Therefore, it may not be possible for every group to be included on an official body to deal with the issue, but all stakeholders will be properly consulted, and their input will be valued and listened to as we go forward.

Mr Speaker: I remind Members that they must continually rise in their place if they wish to ask a supplementary question. Members still seem

to be of the belief that they have to rise only once or twice and that will be enough.

Mr G Robinson: I commend the work of the CTA, which does a great job for those who use such transport in Northern Ireland. Will the Minister update the House on the discussions he has had with other Departments to channel some of their services to the CTA to avoid duplication and provide a streamlined, accessible transport service for rural dwellers in Northern Ireland?

The Minister for Regional Development: I have had discussions with other Departments and, as part of the reform of public transport, we intend to have further discussions. The Health Department and the Education Department have responsibility for some transport services, and the Department for Regional Development obviously has responsibility for transport for the general public. Opportunities exist to discuss cross-departmental measures to ensure that we are not wasting resources and that buses that are used for school runs do not sit in yards for the rest of the day but are used to their full potential. Therefore, a range of discussions will be ongoing.

The CTA plays a valuable role. We are looking at how community transport can become more involved in the provision of a door-to-door service. As the reform of public transport progresses, there will be opportunities to talk to other Departments about their transport requirements and the resources that they are putting into transport to see where efficiency savings can be made together.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. There is no doubt that community transport, rural transport etc has an important role to play in communities, particularly for those with difficulties in accessing transport and in getting from place to place. What financial support has the Department given to the Community Transport Association?

The Minister for Regional Development: In the financial year 2009-2010, £230,000 was paid to the Community Transport Association. That support paid for staff salaries, accommodation and the delivery of a work programme that was agreed with my Department.

Mr Speaker: I call Leslie Cree for a supplementary question. Once again, I remind Members that they must rise in their place. We cannot guess here at the Table.

Mr Cree: I was getting round to it, Mr Speaker.

I, too, thank the Minister for his response. However, I am disappointed to hear that there are no plans to develop CTA. Is this purely for the current year, or are there opportunities ongoing for the development of that important network?

The Minister for Regional Development: There are no plans for the immediate future. As part of the reform of public transport, however, we have to look across the whole range of people who are involved in transport provision to ensure that we get the best, most streamlined, joined-up service for transport for the general public. As I said, however, other Departments use transport, and we are all increasingly facing restricted budgets and have to use our resources as best we can. Therefore, there will be a role for everyone who is involved in transport provision to pull together and get the best possible system.

The objective is to get more people using public transport. Therefore, we need it to be accessible, integrated, efficient, comfortable and joined-up. That is the intention of the exercise, and there will be a role for everyone involved in public transport in providing that.

Mr Speaker: Questions 7, 8 and 9 have been withdrawn.

Bangor: Traffic

10. **Mr Weir** asked the Minister for Regional Development what action his Department is taking to ensure that there is no repeat of the recent traffic chaos in Bangor. (AQO 1072/10)

The Minister for Regional Development: Roads Service has advised that the closure of Bryansburn Road was required to facilitate the installation of new foul and storm sewers by NI Water. Rathgael Road was closed to facilitate essential carriageway resurfacing and drainage improvement works. Both schemes were part of the Department's ongoing investment in the roads and water infrastructure in north Down.

During the planning stage, it was not envisaged that those works would have a significant adverse effect on traffic progression. However, when both schemes commenced on 22 March, it was quickly recognised that the simultaneous closure of Bryansburn Road and Rathgael Road was causing unacceptable traffic delays. Roads Service promptly responded to the situation and

introduced a one-way system on the Rathgael Road for Bangor-bound traffic. That operated daily from 4.00 pm and successfully alleviated delays to the evening peak traffic flow.

Roads Service took all reasonable steps in both the implementation of the works and the introduction of prompt traffic management remedial measures to alleviate traffic delays. I am pleased to confirm that the work to install the new foul and storm sewers on Bryansburn Road, as well as the resurfacing work on Rathgael Road, has been completed, and both roads have reopened. Although utilities have a statutory right to place apparatus in the street, they are required to register their intention of such works with Roads Service within notice periods laid down in article 6 of the street works Order. That register provides an effective basis for conveying information to all concerned about the proposed work. In addition, Roads Service officials are in daily contact with utilities, agreeing traffic management plans and adjusting utility project plans, all in an attempt to mitigate disruption.

In discharging its responsibilities, Roads Service is continually striving to achieve a key principle of co-ordination, which is the need to balance the potentially conflicting interests of road users and the customers of the utility companies.

Mr Weir: Thank you, Minister. I do not think that anyone doubted the need for the work to be done. The problem was that the two projects were carried out simultaneously and were authorised by Roads Service to be carried out simultaneously. That is disappointing. In light of the experience of Bangor, will the Minister give an assurance that there will in future be consultation with, for example, local councils prior to works being done and a decision being taken on the timing, so that the traffic bottlenecks that we got in Bangor as a result of those works happening at the same time will not reoccur?

The Minister for Regional Development: There is a sense from the answer that was provided to me by Roads Service that there was not the correct anticipation of what the traffic problem would be when there was a simultaneous road closure. Obviously, measures were required to try to mitigate that, and lessons will have to be learned from that.

With regard to consultation, Roads Service officials will continue to meet district councils

on a six-monthly basis to advise of programme schemes. Officials will, when requested, also meet elected representatives to discuss work programmes in more detail. It is important to note that the details of the annual works programme may change due to the availability of funding.

3.30 pm

Regional Development Strategy

11. **Mr O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the review of the regional development strategy. (AQO 1073/10)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department is drafting the revised regional development strategy, and I intend to seek the Executive's clearance for public consultation in the autumn.

Mr O'Dowd: Will the Minister confirm that he is liaising with his counterparts in the Twenty-six Counties to ensure that we have an all-Ireland development plan?

The Minister for Regional Development: We have worked in ongoing close liaison with the Department of Transport in the South through the North/South Ministerial Council in transport sectoral format. We also liaise with the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government in the South with respect to spatial planning and on the general approach to the regional development strategy. I assure the Member that we will continue such liaison on our proposals. A key aspect of the revised regional development strategy will be to take account of development opportunities North and South and to continue to develop both an all-Ireland and a regional approach to regional development and to the economy.

Mr Speaker: I have received notice of a question for urgent oral answer, tabled under Standing Order 20A, to the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister on matters relating to the volcanic ash cloud over Europe. Members will be aware that business has moved on quicker than expected today. Therefore, by leave of the Assembly, I propose to suspend the sitting until 3.45 pm, when the question will be taken.

The sitting was suspended at 3.31 pm.

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

3.45 pm

Question for Urgent Oral Answer

Volcanic Ash Cloud

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Speaker has received notice of a question for urgent oral answer under Standing Order 20A to the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister.

Mr McDevitt asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how many people from Northern Ireland are believed to be stranded abroad as a result of the volcanic ash cloud over Europe; what liaison they have had with the British and Irish Governments and the air traffic control authorities on this issue; and what arrangements are being made to assist local people to get home.

The deputy First Minister (Mr M McGuinness): I understand that this afternoon's reports suggest that there is evidence that the volcano has subsided and that ash is no longer feeding into the weather system. We hope that, if that position continues, airspace may start to open tomorrow.

We are extremely sympathetic to the plight of those who are currently affected by the travel chaos caused by the volcanic ash cloud, particularly those who are stranded abroad. Since the first information on the volcanic ash plume became available on Wednesday 14 April, we have continued to monitor reports from the Met Office and to liaise with other Departments and agencies here, as well as with our counterparts in Britain and Ireland, to monitor the potential impacts on public health and the environment.

A range of information specific to the volcanic ash was available on the NI Direct website from early on Thursday 15 April, including links to airports and advice on the implications from a health perspective. That provided the main points of contact in one place. That information was also issued via the social media platforms Twitter and Facebook. As the situation developed, the information was updated and supplemented

with details about passenger rights and travel insurance. That is updated as the situation develops.

It is the responsibility of the British Government to deal with the return to London and other British airports of those who are stranded. The Member may be aware that the British Prime Minister has announced that Navy ships will soon be deployed to help individuals stranded abroad. We received a readout from the Secretary of State following the COBRA meeting this morning, and we will continue to liaise with him to provide information in relation to passengers from here who are stranded, so that that can be taken into consideration at further meetings of COBRA.

I have been in contact with Micheál Martin, and we agreed the need for Ministers and officials from both Administrations to work closely together on the developing situation. In addition, we are, in association with Translink and the ports and airports, doing everything that we can to help passengers. To ensure that our efforts are fully co-ordinated, the Minister for Regional Development has been in direct contact with Noel Dempsey, the Southern Minister for Transport. His officials are in continuing contact with both the British and Irish Transport Departments.

Translink is operating additional bus and rail services to help to cope with the increase in the number of foot passengers using ferry services. Additional cross-channel coach services are being operated in conjunction with Scottish Citylink, National Express and Eurolines. Up to 9,000 passenger places each day between Belfast and Stranraer can be provided by Stena Line; Norfolkline is providing 1,000 passenger places each day between Belfast and Liverpool; and P&O is providing up to 10,000 passenger places each day between Larne and Cairnryan and Larne and Troon.

Peak services for Stena Line have been fully booked as passengers divert to surface routes, but there is generally up to 50% spare capacity on overnight sailings. There is still some spare capacity on the Larne routes, but Norfolkline is fully booked until Thursday 22 April. Translink is also working closely with ferry services P&O and Stena Line to meet the demand coming off the ferries at Larne harbour and Belfast. We shall continue to work closely with transport providers

to ensure that additional demand on ferry, bus and rail services can be accommodated.

Mr McDevitt: I join the deputy First Minister in welcoming any good news with regard to the situation at the volcano itself. Can the First Minister and deputy First Minister tell us specifically how many of our neighbours are stranded abroad? Do the Ministers understand, as many of us do in this House, that very many of those who are caught abroad are young, vulnerable schoolchildren? Some of them will be running out of money and medication. What specific steps, at a devolved Administration level, are the Ministers going to take to make sure that those people have the means to get home? Some of them may now find themselves in very critical situations indeed.

The deputy First Minister: We are conscious of the difficulties faced by the many people who have found themselves stranded as a result of this phenomenal development, particularly those who do not have at their disposal the means to ensure that they could travel by alternative ways. It is too early to say how many people are directly involved, because we all know that that is a fairly massive task. Figures are being collated, and, on completion, they will be supplied to COBRA. Given that we are facing a more optimistic situation, with the prospect of airways being open within the next 24 to 48 hours, if the subsidence continues, the task will turn to the expenses that people have incurred as a result of their prolonged stays. That raises all sorts of questions that will have to receive some consideration, not least by insurance companies, airlines and Administrations. Whether anything can be done to assist those people is something that will have to be explored.

The Chairperson of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (Mr Kennedy): I am grateful for the opportunity to ask the deputy First Minister a question on this important issue. I welcome his earlier comments and the indication that it appears that progress will be possible in the coming hours. Is there any estimation as to what the shutdown of flights at airports is costing the Northern Ireland economy? Has an assessment been made of the number of people who are stranded in Northern Ireland and unable to return to other venues? Will the deputy First Minister assure the House that regular updates to Members of the House,

members of the OFMDFM Committee and, most importantly, the public, will be provided as quickly as accurate information becomes available?

The deputy First Minister: On behalf of OFMDFM, I give the commitment that we will endeavour to keep people as fully informed as possible as things develop, and we will continue to maintain contact with the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister.

Information on the number of people who have found themselves stranded here is also being collated. There are people from different parts of the world stranded here. Those from European destinations have endeavoured to use the seas to get back to the continent, by travelling through England, Scotland or Wales, but it is too soon to say what the exact figures are. We will make those numbers available when they have been established. All of that will become superfluous if, as is expected, the hopeful news that we received in the past short while that the volcano has ceased, for the moment, comes to pass. If the airways are open within 24 to 48 hours, we must ensure that the obvious resultant demand will be met as quickly as possible.

All of that is important, and we understand that information is the key ingredient, particularly at a time like this. People detest nothing more than being in the dark and not knowing how they are fixed. Some of us heard the complaints that were aired on the radio this morning about the situation in Barcelona, where it has been suggested that people who were on an Aer Lingus flight from Dublin were being provided with assistance and information, while people who were on an Aer Lingus flight out of Belfast believed that they were being treated differently. I spoke to Micheál Martin today about that issue, and he has undertaken to raise it with the Aer Lingus authorities, as we have done.

Adjourned at 3.55 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 20 April 2010

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Ministerial Statement

British-Irish Council: Energy Ministers' Meeting

Mr Speaker: I have received notice from the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment that she wishes to make a statement.

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mrs Foster): With your permission, Mr Speaker, I wish to make a statement in compliance with section 52 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 regarding a meeting of the British-Irish Council energy Ministers. The statement has been agreed with junior Minister Gerry Kelly, and I make it on behalf of us both.

The meeting was held on Monday 22 March 2010 between 9.00 am and 12.00 noon at Church House, Westminster, London. The Executive were represented by junior Minister Gerry Kelly and me, attending by video conference from Netherleigh House. The UK Government were represented by Lord Hunt of Kings Heath, Minister of State at the Department of Energy and Climate Change, who chaired the meeting. The Irish Government were represented by Eamon Ryan TD, Minister for Communications, Energy, and Natural Resources. A full list of delegates is appended to the written copy of this statement, which was circulated to Members in advance of the sitting.

The British-Irish Council was established under the Good Friday Agreement as a forum for its members to work together on matters of mutual interest within their respective competencies. The energy sectoral group was established at the British-Irish Council summit meeting on 20 February 2009 and includes an electricity grid infrastructure subgroup led by the UK Government, through the Department of Energy and Climate Change, and a marine renewables subgroup led by the Scottish Government. The

sectoral group's task was to consider and report back to the British-Irish Council ministerial summit on relevant energy matters of mutual interest that affect British-Irish Council members.

At the meeting on 22 March 2010, progress was noted on a number of specific areas of work that could be taken forward over the coming months in the grid infrastructure and marine energy subgroups. It was agreed that energy is vital to all our jurisdictions and that there are many areas of mutual interest that offer opportunities for collaboration to help meet challenging European Union energy targets. Ministers agreed that the subgroups should report progress on both work streams to the next BIC summit, which is planned for June 2010 in Guernsey.

Ministers considered the discussion paper that was prepared by the electricity grid infrastructure subgroup and was presented by Lord Hunt. Discussion centred on identifying key areas for consideration and information exchange and the subgroup's future work programme. Andy Hiorns of National Grid and Andrew Cooke of EirGrid also gave presentations to Ministers on grid infrastructure developments in the UK and Ireland.

Ministers agreed that the British-Irish Council grid subgroup would focus its work on the following areas: exchanging information and experience of research and development and other studies to promote greater understanding and co-operation in electricity grid infrastructure; sharing experience of and approaches to the regulation and planning consenting of electricity grid infrastructure to promote best practice and effective decision making within and, where relevant, between BIC members; and working together to exert greater influence on the direction of emerging EU policy on grid infrastructure and to leverage maximum EU funding, where applicable to relevant members,

from EU sources for grid infrastructure developments and projects of mutual interest. In endorsing those areas for future discussion, Ministers recognised the existing co-operation between British-Irish Council members. They agreed that the British-Irish Council has an important role to play in furthering understanding and sharing experience to assist in meeting the challenges from climate change and maintaining security of energy supply.

Jim Mather, Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism in the Scottish Government, gave a presentation on the work that is being undertaken by the marine renewables energy subgroup. That ministerial group has discussed marine planning and policy, research activity, initiatives in the marine energy areas and the scope for and benefits of greater exploitation of marine energy resources across British-Irish Council member Administrations. Ministers welcomed the group's progress and future work plan, which includes dialogue with the European Commission on its funding and policy initiatives. Ministers also noted that marine energy will be the theme of the next British-Irish Council ministerial summit, where the subgroup's recommendations will be discussed. A presentation will be delivered at that plenary session on the marine renewable opportunities within the Channel Islands.

Junior Minister Kelly and I endorsed both papers as being a sensible way to proceed to help Northern Ireland to meet its challenging renewable energy targets for 2020. Ministers recognised that careful attention would be required to address environmental and public concerns on the development and location of future energy infrastructure. There are many economic and environmental benefits for the people of these islands in the use of new sustainable generating technologies. It was recognised by Ministers that Northern Ireland has already demonstrated such benefits. For example, Lord Hunt agreed that the development of the SeaGen tidal wave project at Strangford Lough is a particular exemplar of the way in which a range of energy and environmental policy objectives can be addressed.

The two papers reflect the useful discussions between officials over the past year and will send a strong message to the European Union on our co-operation and determination to deliver a robust and sustainable energy infrastructure across the British Isles. Minister Kelly and I

welcome the proposals, as they will enhance opportunities for economic growth and green job creation, strengthen security of supply and help reduce fuel poverty by increasing the diversity of energy sources. They will also support Northern Ireland in engaging and influencing the regional energy agenda, especially in relation to the wider European Union drive on security of supply, climate change and economic recovery.

We commend the work of the British-Irish Council to date in developing its energy work stream to the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Mr Campbell: I welcome the Minister's statement. The issue of renewable energy regularly concentrates minds, and rightly so. The Minister referred to the targets for the next 10 years. Will she indicate to the House the need to take account of widespread consultations, particularly around the north coast, when considering the development of offshore wind farms, which have raised a lot of objection in the past?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: During the summit, a good deal of time was spent talking about the need to gain the public's acceptance of proposals and, indeed, to ensure better understanding of the need to have renewable energy sources and grid infrastructure, as Members can imagine.

We had a long discussion about how we need to engage with the public to explain what is going on with renewables and grid infrastructure. We looked to other member Administrations to learn from their experiences. Scotland has been involved in quite a bit of planning for an interconnector that has been put in place there and was recently approved by the relevant Minister. We can learn a lot of lessons from the experience there. Some of those lessons are good, and we will learn from them. However, we also want to learn about what went wrong. It is a hugely important area, and it is important to bring the public with us when we are talking about energy infrastructure and renewables.

Ms J McCann: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her statement. My question is about wind generation for electricity. To date, the single electricity market in Ireland has been quite successful, and hopefully it will be in the future. There are also longer-term plans for a European single electricity market. I agree with the public's concerns about where the particular

infrastructure for that would be put, which needs to be planned. There is the potential for us to become exporters, because, obviously, wind cannot be stored.

Mr Speaker: The Member should come to her question.

Ms J McCann: Sorry. Was any thought given to that at the meeting?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and

Investment: Grid infrastructure, which is a huge issue for us, was the principal issue that was discussed. Marine energy was discussed only latterly. We wanted to talk about the grid infrastructure not just on the island of Ireland but for the rest of the UK, what was happening there and what was happening at a European regional level. The Republic's Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources, Eamon Ryan, talked a lot about why it was so important to have the new interconnector between Wales and the Republic of Ireland. As the Member knows, we have the Moyle interconnector with Scotland. That is incredibly important for us, because, although we take energy from Scotland at times, there are also times when we export. It is important that we have that interconnectedness to enable us to export.

The Member is right: there are times when we have a lot of wind. I do not know whether the Member has had the chance to visit Systems Operators Northern Ireland (SONI), but down there one can see the amount of wind power that is coming in at any one time. It fluctuates greatly. There is a need for us to have the infrastructure to deal with that issue. As the Member knows, an all-Ireland grid study was carried out, and it looked at how much capacity we could cope with. It said that we could take 42% of our renewables onto that grid infrastructure. Therefore, we need to look at our grid. It is going to involve huge capital expenditure moving forward, and we need to plan it in such a way that consumers are not hit with disproportionate costs when it comes to the point of expanding our grid. The Member will also know that we very much want to move ahead with our second interconnector, and the ice storms that we had in March point to the reason for that.

Mr Cree: The Minister is aware of the electricity grid weakness in the west of the Province and the high cost of reinforcing it. Was that issue raised at the meeting? Furthermore, in

the context of adding wind generators, was the Minister able to identify any EU funding that could be accessed to assist with the reinforcement of the grid in the west?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and

Investment: The west was not specifically mentioned at the meeting. We were looking at grid infrastructure more from a strategic point of view. We will certainly be looking to all sources of funding to strengthen the grid. Indeed, I understand that the new interconnector between the Republic of Ireland and Wales benefits from the European Union in that about one fifth of the cost comes from European funding. Therefore, we will be looking at that. As the most peripheral part of Europe, we have a strong case for capital expenditure if we want to raise the standard of our grid and meet the European Union targets.

Mr McDevitt: I welcome the Minister's commitment to sustainable energy and, in particular, to tackling climate change. I hope that she is successful in advocating that position more widely in her party.

I want to ask about tidal and other forms of sea current generation. Can the Minister report on any further proposals to take new projects beyond the one that has, to date, been relatively successful in Strangford Lough?

10.45 am

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and

Investment: In respect of the SeaGen project in Strangford Lough, it is very gratifying to hear something within one's own jurisdiction being referred to at a British-Irish Council meeting as an exemplar, so we should be rightly proud of what has happened with the marine current turbine in Strangford Lough. The Member may be aware that we are finalising our draft offshore renewable strategy. Subsequently, when we have identified places that are suitable for offshore renewables, we hope to put out a call for projects.

It is a hugely exciting time for energy. I listened to the other member Administrations represented at the meeting, and it is clear that they are pushing ahead. We need to push ahead as well, because we cannot be left behind, especially given that we have such a marvellous resource off the coast of Northern Ireland. I very much want to see us moving ahead, but we can only do so in partnership, because we

only have jurisdiction of tidal waters up to 12 miles out, beyond which one enters territory in which one has to deal with the Crown Estate. Nevertheless, we will move ahead because there are huge opportunities, not just in the renewable energy field. Invest Northern Ireland is looking at how we can capitalise on what is going on in renewables, so that we might get more manufacturing jobs and benefit from the design end of things. Yes, we are certainly forging ahead in that area.

Mr Neeson: The Minister will be pleased to learn that the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment met at Castlereagh House last week, and the time that we spent in the control room was interesting.

We recognise the impact that the EU will have on energy policy. What plans do both jurisdictions have to discuss energy issues with the European Commissioner for Energy?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:

The Member is right to identify the European Union as an area on which we need to concentrate. I was not aware that members of the Committee had been to Castlereagh House, but I am glad that they were there, because it is a magnificent facility. It is quite scary to see all the lights and so forth. Nevertheless, it is a good facility —

Mr Neeson: At least they were on.

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:

That is right. I am not sure that I would have liked being there on the Tuesday before Easter, when things might have been a little more frantic.

Towards the end of the meeting, we discussed the need to work collaboratively in order to make a case to the European Union on issues such as grid infrastructure and renewables. Obviously, some jurisdictions that were at the British-Irish Council meeting do not benefit from European Union membership, particularly the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man, but they want to work with us on European Union matters in order to benefit from being part of the British-Irish Council. The meeting was excellent, and I am looking forward to going to the next summit in Guernsey.

Mr Weir: I thank the Minister for her statement. On the issue of energy co-operation, will the Minister update Members on the latest position

on the North/South interconnector? It appears that some Members opposite do not have a great deal of enthusiasm for it.

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:

As one would expect, at the meeting, both the Irish Government and ourselves mentioned having the second interconnector in place. I am not going to talk about the route or planning consent. Suffice it to say that we recognised the need to engage with the public so that they understand why we need to have it.

The ice storm of the Tuesday before Easter illustrated why we need the second interconnector. I am not sure whether Members realise that, at various stages throughout that evening, SONI lost three of the four 275 kV lines from Ballylumford, all four lines from Kilroot and the two lines into Coolkeeragh. In addition, the two cables comprising the Moyle interconnector were also lost at times and had to be put on again very quickly. Most of those faults were caused by the system tripping as a result of ice accretion, a term that I had never heard of before 30 March 2010. Most faults were repaired quickly, but a number reoccurred as ice build-up continued on the line.

The capacity of the North/South 275 kilovolt interconnector may have been inadequate to handle power flows from the Republic if the compounded impacts of those faults had continued. If that had happened, the system would have started to shed load. Blocks of customers would have been taken offline in order to avoid total shutdown. Therefore, parts of Northern Ireland could have been left in darkness. There is real strategic need for that second interconnector. I hope that every Member recognises that need. If so, we can discuss all the other issues.

Executive Committee Business

Unsolicited Services (Trade and Business Directories) Bill: Second Stage

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mrs Foster): I beg to move

That the Second Stage of the Unsolicited Services (Trade and Business Directories) Bill [NIA12/09] be agreed.

It may be helpful to the Assembly if I begin by outlining the background to the Bill. Before I do that, I thank the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment for its helpful scrutiny and advice during the development of the Bill and the policy that lies behind it.

The Bill re-enacts, with amendments, the provisions of the Unsolicited Goods and Services (Northern Ireland) Order 1976 in respect of charges for entries into business or trade directories. One reason for the 1976 Order was to regulate the circumstances in which businesses could be charged for publication of entries about them in directories. Before the 1976 Order became law, unwary businesses could be tricked by various sharp practices into paying for directory entries that they had not requested and did not want.

The Bill is a technical measure that consolidates the law in that area and removes provisions that my Department believes are burdensome and unnecessary for businesses. It also removes anomalies. It is intended that the Bill will enable businesses to improve efficiency by relaxing and simplifying arrangements for repeats and renewals of directory entries and by putting in place arrangements for sending order forms electronically and requirements that cover the form and content of invoices and other documents.

The Bill has been drafted to ensure that the law in Northern Ireland continues to provide existing safeguards for business against certain deceptions that are practised in relation to the publication of real or pretended directory products. The Bill will also bring Northern Ireland into line with the law in GB and ensure that there is compliance with article 9(1) of the European Commission e-commerce directive.

The equivalent in Great Britain of the 1976 Order is the Unsolicited Goods and Services Act

1971. The Bill will amend the 1976 Order to similar effect to amendments that were made to the 1971 Act by two Statutory Instruments that were passed in 2005. To ensure that there is compliance with article 9 of the e-commerce directive, an amendment to the law is required to create an electronic equivalent of a business order form. That could have been achieved by the Department making regulations under section 2(2) of the European Communities Act 1972 to amend the 1976 Order in a similar way to the Unsolicited Goods and Services Act 1971 (Electronic Commerce) (Amendment) Regulations 2005. However, the authorities in Great Britain considered that the 1971 Act should be amended at the same time in order to relax the existing requirements under which clients renew or extend existing contracts for entries in a directory and to simplify requirements as to the form and content of certain documents that relate to contracts for directory entries. That was achieved by the Regulatory Reform (Unsolicited Goods and Services Act 1971) (Directory Entries and Demands for Payment) Order 2005. That Order was made under the Regulatory Reform Act 2001, which does not apply to Northern Ireland legislation.

My Department wishes to ensure that Northern Ireland businesses have the same benefits and protections in this area of law as those in the rest of the United Kingdom. Accordingly, I decided to introduce a Bill to the Assembly. The Great Britain Statutory Instruments were constrained by limited powers to make them consistent with the Regulatory Reform Act 2001 and the European Communities Act 1972. An Assembly Bill is not similarly constrained. Therefore, the Bill will restate the law, with amendments that are similar to those that were made by the recent Great Britain Statutory Instruments, in a consolidated and more readily understood form. If Members have followed that, they have done very well.

The Bill before the House, although different in structure, will have exactly the same legal effect as the Act that applies to Great Britain, as amended. The Department considers that anyone who complies with the law in GB will comply with the law in Northern Ireland, as set out in the Bill.

My Department carried out extensive consultation on the Bill. During the process of policy development, the Department agreed with the

Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment that the Department should contact certain organisations to offer additional briefing during consultation. That was done, and we took steps to specifically offer additional briefing to the Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce and the Northern Ireland branches of the Institute of Directors, the Federation of Small Businesses and the Confederation of British Industry. None of those organisations had any concerns with the proposals, and they have welcomed the Bill. The Federation of Small Businesses in Northern Ireland has welcomed the simplification of the law, the elimination of burdensome and unnecessary procedures and the bringing of Northern Ireland law into line with that in Great Britain.

I will summarise the content of the Bill. The Bill has nine clauses and one schedule, which make minor and consequential amendments. Clauses 1 to 6 are equivalent to section 3 of the 1971 Act that applies to Great Britain, as amended by recent Statutory Instruments, but restated in a separate form. That approach removes the need for unnecessary cross-referencing, and the text has been consolidated and simplified.

Clause 1 imposes a general prohibition on charges, unless the requirements of clauses 2, 3, 4 and 5 are met. Clause 2 sets out the requirements relating to a signed order form for a trade or business directory entry note of agreement. Clause 3 deals with the requirements for signed notes of agreement. Clause 4 applies requirements to certain cases of electronic communication. Clause 5 permits charges in certain cases of renewed or extended contracts. Clause 6 makes it an offence for anyone to demand payment unless the requirements of clauses 2, 3, 4 or 5 are met. Clause 7 states that my Department will have the power to amend the schedule to the Bill by Order, subject to negative resolution. An Order under that clause may also make any necessary transitional provisions and amendments to provisions that are referred to in the schedule. The schedule sets out certain matters that are included in documents that are referred to in clauses 3, 4 and 5. Clause 8 makes consequential amendments and repeals certain provisions of the 1976 Order.

In summary, I believe that the Bill will ensure compliance with the European Union e-commerce directive and will facilitate electronic commerce by introducing equivalence between paper-based and electronic methods for contracting an entry

in a directory. The Bill also updates the law to reflect modern commercial realities of the directory-publishing industry, while ensuring that legislation continues to provide protection for businesses against a number of scams.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mr A Maginness):

I welcome the Unsolicited Services (Trade and Business Directories) Bill and the opportunity to contribute to the debate. The Department has kept the Committee fully informed throughout the process of developing the Bill to this stage, and I thank the Minister for that. The Committee is grateful to the Minister and her officials for the comprehensive and timely briefings that it has received.

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

The Bill's purpose is to update legislation controlling the circumstances in which businesses can be charged for the publication of entries about them in business directories. It relaxes and simplifies arrangements for repeat and renewal directory entries, arrangements for sending order forms electronically and requirements covering the form and the content of invoices and other documents. The Committee recognises that the changes are technical, minor and non-controversial, and that is reflected in the responses to the Department's consultation.

11.00 am

The most noticeable response was that of the Federation of Small Businesses, which welcomed the simplification of the law and the elimination of what it saw as burdensome and unnecessary procedures. It went on to say that the Bill may provide an opportunity to raise awareness of the practices against which the Bill will provide protection, and I certainly hope that that will be the case.

In conclusion, the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment supports the principles of the Bill. It will consider its proposals further during the evidence gathering process.

Mr Cree: I also welcome the Second Stage of the Unsolicited Services (Trade and Business Directories) Bill, although it is a great pity that it does not have a shorter title. As mentioned, the Bill is a relatively straightforward piece of legislation that will bring Northern Ireland into line with GB and ensure compliance with the European Community's e-commerce directive.

The provisions of the Bill control the circumstances in which businesses may be charged for the publication of entries about them in directories, helping to ensure that that process is transparent and that businesses know what they are getting up front. It will also improve efficiency by relaxing and simplifying arrangements for repeats and renewals of directory entries, and it will help to simplify arrangements for sending order forms electronically and the requirements covering the form and content of invoices. Therefore, the Bill will be a welcome assistance to businesses in Northern Ireland.

However, it is somewhat disappointing that the Bill was not introduced earlier. It reflects corresponding legislation in Great Britain that was introduced in 2005 and it will fulfil our European obligations. It is no secret that we have had significant problems in fulfilling our European obligations in other areas. Therefore, I would have thought that the Minister would have considered a simpler procedure to be a higher priority.

Last month, it was brought to the attention of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment that businesses and individuals were being targeted with fraudulent invoices, a practice that the Bill will go some way to restrict by helping businesses to identify potentially fraudulent entries in trade directories. Therefore, it is disappointing that it has taken Northern Ireland five years to catch up with the rest of the United Kingdom, and I ask the Minister to inform the House if her Department is not meeting any other European directive. However, I am happy to support the Bill.

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and

Investment: I am very pleased to note the broad support for the proposals contained in the Bill. Members appreciate that the Bill is a technical measure, but it is important that we update the law in Northern Ireland to reflect the commercial realities of the trade and commercial directory publishing industry in the twenty-first century.

I note Mr Cree's comments, but the Bill only relates to trade directories and not other directories that he may be referring to. I also note the comments that he made in the ETI Committee and the comments that my officials made in response to a press release in February 2010 about Yell, which had encountered difficulties as invoices purporting to be from the company were found to be fraudulent. Yell

has worked closely with the Trading Standards Service in the Department after indicating that there were difficulties. The service continues to work closely with industry and provides examples of fraudulent invoices on its website to alert businesses to that potential problem.

In relation to Mr Cree's comments as to why the Bill was not introduced sooner, I explained in my opening remarks that the process could not be done by regulation and had to be done through a full Bill, because of the way in which matters were dealt with in GB. That meant that time had to be found to bring forward the Bill, and, although I understand his comments, there are no trade publishers in Northern Ireland and anyone who was affected here would have been covered by GB law. However, I wanted to bring the matter to the Floor of the House as soon as possible to deal with the anomaly and gap that existed, to ensure that if anyone set up a trade publication business in Northern Ireland we could deal with the issue directly.

As I said, I am grateful to the Members who have contributed, not only in the House but at the Committee. I look forward to the next stage of the Bill's progress through the Assembly, and we look forward to engaging with the Committee. As the Chairperson recognised, we have consulted more than is normal for a Bill. I make no apology for that; it is good that we engage with the industry to show it that we are listening to its concerns, that we wish to simplify issues for it and that we are dealing with better regulation issues. That and other issues are of key importance to the Bill.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Second Stage of the Unsolicited Services (Trade and Business Directories) Bill [NIA 12/09] be agreed.

Welfare Reform Bill: Second Stage

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

*That the Second Stage of the Welfare Reform Bill
[NIA 13/09] be agreed.*

The Welfare Reform Bill makes provision for Northern Ireland similar to that made for Britain by the Welfare Reform Act 2009, which received Royal Assent on 12 November 2009. The Bill will further reform the welfare and benefits systems to improve support and incentives for people to move from benefits into work and set the scene for the eventual abolition of income support.

The next stage of reform is about creating a system that recognises that barriers to work are different for each individual, a system that is flexible enough to respond with personalised support and a system in which most people move towards an eventual return to work and are expected to take up the support that is available to them. We know that that approach works and that combining rights with responsibilities, having regular contact with our customers and getting them to think about a return to work can change not only mindsets and outcomes but lives.

The key provisions in the Bill draw heavily from the report entitled 'Realising Potential: A Vision for Personalised Conditionality and Support' by Professor Paul Gregg, which was published alongside the White Paper 'Raising expectations and increasing support: reforming welfare for the future' in December 2008. Professor Gregg recommended a system of personalised conditionality matched by personalised support with virtually everyone who is of working age and on benefits being expected to take active steps towards work.

He identified three broad groups. First are those who are work-ready. The second group is those for whom an immediate return to work is not appropriate but for whom working could become a genuine possibility with time, encouragement and support. That second group is referred to as the "progression to work" group. The third group comprises people for whom there should be no requirements.

The work-ready group comprises people who are on jobseeker's allowance. Most people who claim jobseeker's allowance leave benefits

in less than two years. Even in the current economic climate, most leave within six months. However, some people do linger, and we need to build on the substantial support that we are making available earlier in the jobseekers' regime to minimise the risk that jobseekers will repeatedly cycle through the system.

It is for that reason that the Bill makes provision for a "work for your benefit" programme. That programme will be designed to move jobseekers closer to the labour market, help them to find sustained work in the open labour market and provide them with the experiences and training that they need to end the cycle of benefit dependency. Although the Bill makes provision for the programme, I emphasise that it will be piloted initially in four areas in Britain. The introduction of the programme to Northern Ireland and the form that the programme will take here will be considered following a full evaluation of those pilots.

The progression to work group will include people in a work-related activity group who receive employment and support allowance, partners of certain benefit claimants and lone parents with young children. We want to ensure that preparation for work becomes a natural progression rather than a sudden step. The Bill makes provision for a requirement to undertake work-related activity and for people to be mandated to a specific work-related activity that is prescribed in an action plan. As with the work for your benefit scheme, work-related activity will be piloted initially in Britain. Although the Bill includes provisions for that, its introduction in Northern Ireland will be considered following a full evaluation of those pilots.

The Bill also contains powers to ensure that people on employment and support allowance in the work-related activity group undertake activity that is most appropriate to addressing their individual barriers to work. Those reforms will deliver better, more flexible and more appropriate support to people across the spectrum of out-of-work benefits by providing a personalised model of support and conditionality that is not dependent on the benefit that a person claims, but on the circumstances in which he or she claims it.

Work-related activity will also be initially piloted in Britain, and its introduction in Northern Ireland will be considered after a full evaluation of those pilots. There are those who, rightly,

should not be required to look for work or to undertake activity in order to move closer to the labour market. I am referring to people with caring responsibilities, those who have a serious illness or disability, and the parents of very young children. However, many will want to make that journey, and we must support them in doing so. We must make support better, more flexible and more suitable for people when they need it. That is what Part 1 of the Bill addresses.

We also want to simplify the benefits system so that it is easier for people to engage with it. The Bill signals the intention to abolish income support when resources allow and when it is clear how that change will fit with other changes that are under way. The aim is to move towards a dual benefits system for people of working age that is based on the employment and support allowance, which is specifically for people with a health condition or disability; and jobseeker's allowance, which is for a range of other groups. People moving from income support to jobseeker's allowance will retain the same level of conditionality as at present. We also propose to amend the law so that couples in which one partner is capable of work will make a claim for jobseeker's allowance. That will ensure that the partner who is closest to the labour market can access as much support as possible in order to move back into work. We will not move carers from income support until we have a clear plan that sets out how we will reform the benefits system over the longer term.

The remaining adult dependency increases in the benefits system will be abolished, and the contribution conditions for employment and support allowance and jobseeker's allowance will be more closely aligned. Powers are being established to improve the delivery of community care grants and to allow us to provide items, such as white goods, at a much lower cost. The Bill also contains provisions to extend the circumstances in which payments on account of benefit can be made. That will allow for advance payments of benefits to be made to those who are facing hardship while they are waiting for their first full benefit payment.

We will not tolerate violence against benefits office staff, and we will sanction those who engage in such behaviour. We will also sanction those who fail to attend their mandatory interviews at jobs and benefits offices without good reason. Benefit fraud is at a low level, but we are not complacent, and we will increase

the sanctions for those who are found to have committed it. Later, I will speak about the meeting that I had last year with Jim Knight, the relevant Minister in Britain, about the issue of operational flexibility.

Part 2 of the Bill includes provisions for further changes to child maintenance legislation and builds on those made in the Child Maintenance and Other Payments Act 2008. That Part of the Bill will assist with the administration of maintenance payments, extend the offences relating to information to include a failure to report other changes and circumstances, and increase the timescale for bringing a prosecution action for providing false information. Part 3 of the Bill is more general and deals with matters of a technical nature, such as consequential amendments, repeals and transitional arrangements.

The Bill represents a way forward. It is designed so that we can work with people to lift them and their children out of poverty. I am conscious that some people feel that that should be done when children are aged seven rather than five. We want to be flexible enough that the requirements that are placed on people are aligned to their circumstances. People must come first. The Bill is also designed to ensure that the expectations that we have of any claimant are realistic and achievable.

We do not want to create a welfare state that punishes people; we want to create a welfare state that supports people by ensuring that the safety net is never abolished. However, we must not forget that social security can be achieved only through co-operation between the Department and the individual. We are working to provide the help that people need to deal with the challenges of the recession today, which are particularly pernicious. However, we are also determined to take this opportunity to help people to overcome the obstacles that they may face in the future. In other words, we want to help people to find work, which I acknowledge is difficult in the current financial circumstances.

11.15 am

The Bill is a key stage in the continuing reform of the welfare system. I hope that it will allow us to deliver comprehensive reforms to ensure that the welfare state is supported and expects people to support themselves. The Bill is not about punishing people for being on benefits. It is about ensuring that the welfare system

provides them with the opportunities that they need to improve their skills, prepare for work and, where appropriate, move off benefits and into employment. However, there may be circumstances where that is not appropriate.

Let no one say that a recession is the wrong time to address welfare reform. It is precisely the current socio-economic climate that makes reform more urgent, not less.

On 23 July 2009, I met the Minister from the Department for Work and Pensions in London. I told him, as I now tell the House, that there are aspects of the Welfare Reform Bill about which I have some disquiet. I told the Minister that I wanted to have operational flexibility in Northern Ireland. He agreed to that and also to look at certain aspects of the Bill. That is why, contrary to the convention in this House with reference to social security legislation, I instructed that the Bill be subject to full scrutiny by the Committee for Social Development.

That is important. Normally, social security legislation goes through the House according to accelerated passage. In this instance, I disagreed with that, and, within the Committee, there was a variation of views. I did it because I wanted to hear the Committee's views on the legislation. If there are better suggestions about the Bill's operational flexibility which do not endanger parity or the money that we receive through annually managed expenditure, I am very happy to hear them. That is what the Committee process is about, and I want Members to be very aware of that.

As the original legislation was made at Westminster, it is important that we participate there fully in the Committee Stage and in the House of Commons itself, where it is debated at Second Reading — *[Interruption.]*

It is not a laughing matter. It is a serious, practical, political point that I hope all Members will take note of. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order.

The Minister for Social Development: In conclusion, the Bill is designed to help us further along the road to a more personalised benefits system and ensures that parents take full responsibility for their children's upbringing. I am conscious that people feel that sometimes bonding has not been completed by age five, and that it may take a little longer, perhaps until

age seven. Every child and every household is different. I fully appreciate and understand that, although I am not in those particular circumstances myself.

It is a necessary Bill. However, I am very anxious to hear the Committee's views on operational flexibility. I am particularly conscious that the money for these measures and for benefits in general does not come from the Northern Ireland block grant, but from annually managed expenditure that brings a significant amount of money into the Northern Ireland economy on a year-on-year basis.

The Bill is a parity measure and an important step in the ongoing process of welfare reform. Notwithstanding my own reservations, the Bill encourages people to work while supporting those who cannot.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development (Mr Hamilton): The Committee for Social Development devoted substantial energy and time to considering the principles underpinning the Welfare Reform Bill. The Committee reviewed the Green Paper of the equivalent Westminster Bill and responded to that consultation.

The Committee also responded to the Department for Social Development's equality impact assessment consultation on the Northern Ireland version of the Welfare Reform Bill.

Before I refer to the key components of the Bill, I will make some remarks that set out the Committee's general view. I stress that my comments will be an attempt to give the broad range of views that were expressed by the Committee during its deliberations.

The majority of Committee members support the principle of maintaining parity with the rest of the United Kingdom in respect of social security, child maintenance and pensions matters. Most members generally feel that Northern Ireland's position within the UK welfare state is beneficial for those claiming benefits and other claimants. Thus, the majority of members welcome the Bill in so far as it maintains access to existing welfare provision within Northern Ireland and introduces necessary and beneficial reforms.

Given what I just said about the maintenance of parity, I must record the Committee's well-expressed dismay at the Department's delay to the introduction of the Welfare Reform Bill.

That has led to an administrative disparity between Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom in respect of certain social security matters. It is understood that to avoid any possible detriment to claimants in Northern Ireland, Royal Assent for the Bill must be secured before October 2010. To facilitate that, the Committee has agreed that following referral of the Bill, the Committee Stage will be undertaken as expeditiously as possible.

I strongly believe that scrutiny at the Committee Stage and amendment, where necessary, at the Bill's subsequent stages are of critical importance to the legislative process. With that in mind, the Committee will endeavour to complete its work thoroughly and in a timely manner so as to ensure an appropriate level of review, while minimising the consequences of the Department's pre-introduction delay.

I will now make a few remarks on the various clauses of the Bill. As the Minister indicated, the Welfare Reform Bill continues the process of change to social security provision. Many aspects of the Bill are intended to be helpful, such as encouraging the long-term unemployed or those with caring responsibilities to regain the skills and habits associated with employment. The Committee recognises that paid work is a good thing. As I have said in the House before, regular, safe and appropriately rewarded employment brings economic, social and even health benefits to those in employment and, crucially, to their families.

The Committee agrees that no one should be left behind by the welfare state and it welcomes the principle of inclusion for all sections of our community in the benefits of regular and rewarded employment. Although the majority of Committee members do not dispute that principle, some members may have difficulties with the outworkings of the measures proposed in the Bill.

The Bill proposes a work for your benefit scheme, as the Minister outlined. The principle of providing encouragement and intensive support for the longer-term unemployed to help them overcome barriers to employment is welcome. However, the proposed practice of compelling the unemployed to undertake work for no additional remuneration may prove more controversial.

Committee members understand the Department's assurance that such a scheme

would only be introduced to Northern Ireland following the evaluation of pilot schemes in Great Britain and a decision in Westminster to proceed with a national roll-out of the scheme. Nonetheless, members of the Committee are understandably concerned that the Bill requires the Assembly to sign up to a scheme that could be viewed as being unfair to claimants and could also undermine the existing employment market. Committee members will want to explore, as far as time permits, the manner in which that provision can be fairly implemented while maintaining parity with the rest of the UK in social security provision.

The Bill also proposes the complete phased migration of income support claimants to employment and support allowance (ESA) and jobseeker's allowance (JSA). The House has taken a great interest in the implementation of ESA, and members of the Social Development Committee recently visited the ESA processing centre in James House. The record of ESA claimant processing, although greatly improved in recent times, was extremely poor when the new benefit was launched. Although the full migration of income support claimants to ESA and JSA will be phased in, members are keen that there is no repetition of the lengthy processing times, confusion and unnecessary concerns for claimants that characterised the initial transfers to ESA.

The Welfare Reform Bill contains provisions that will require certain lone parents to undertake work-related activity and to produce employment action plans as a condition of the continued receipt of benefits. The Committee notes that the Bill also contains provisions that require the well-being of claimants' children to be considered in the development of employment action plans.

Since the Committee first considered the proposals for the Bill in October 2008 and at every juncture thereafter, members have consistently highlighted concerns about claimants who have children. Members contend that the proposed measures may be workable in Great Britain where so-called wrap-around childcare is available; however, in Northern Ireland, there is considerably less provision for childcare and, as yet, no overarching strategy to address the situation. As a consequence, some Committee members have signalled that the additional measures for lone parents may require amendment or, possibly, further

Assembly procedures to ensure that their implementation does not disadvantage lone parents in Northern Ireland.

The Bill introduces benefit sanctions for fraudsters, claimants who have been convicted or cautioned for violence against benefits staff and for claimants who fail to attend certain mandatory interviews. Everyone will agree that benefit fraud must be countered, and everyone will also agree that all sensible measures should be taken to protect benefits staff from violence or from the threat of violence. The proposed sanctions in that area are understandable and have, generally, been welcomed by the Committee. However, the sanctions for failing to attend mandatory interviews are a cause of concern for some members of the Committee. It is anticipated that some time will be needed to review the proposed outworking of those sanctions and their impact, particularly on the children of claimants.

The Welfare Reform Bill includes measures that, although unwelcome, most members accept as inevitable, including the abolition of adult dependency increases for certain allowances and the requirement for new claimants of contributory ESA and JSA to have more National Insurance contributions. Most members accept that changes to those provisions would be expensive and, therefore, outside the legislative competence of the Assembly.

Some aspects of the Bill are very welcome. For example, in the view of most Committee members, the extension of certain disability living allowance (DLA) payments to the visually impaired, the introduction of payments on account for benefits claimants and the introduction of exemptions from job-seeking conditions for the victims of domestic violence reflect the advantages of parity with the rest of the United Kingdom on social security matters.

Subject to the approval of the House, the Committee for Social Development will review the Bill with its usual rigour and energy. Certain aspects of the Bill that relate, for example, to the contracting out of services provided by the Department for Employment and Learning will be referred to that Department's Committee for scrutiny. Subject to the co-operation of the Department for Social Development, the Committee intends to conclude its scrutiny as quickly as possible. I assure the House that the Committee will ensure, as far as possible, that

there will be no detriment for benefits claimants in Northern Ireland as a consequence of the Department's delay in introducing the Bill.

Before I conclude, I want to make some remarks as a Democratic Unionist Assembly Member. My party has consistently supported helping people who can work to return to work; everyone in the House subscribes to that idea. We are all aware of the very high levels of economic inactivity in Northern Ireland and of the fact that many people included in those statistics want to work, are capable of working and simply need support and encouragement to do so. Furthermore, we are mindful that although the Minister's Department and other Departments can make many interventions, the best way for an individual or a family to get out of poverty is through a good, well-paid job. That is the best antidote to poverty. We all subscribe to the idea of encouraging people who can work and who want to work to get back into the labour market. That is why I am very pleased with the reforms in the Bill and with the support that is proposed.

The support is not only about interviews; it is, in many respects, a hand-holding exercise, because some people who have been out of work for a very long period have forgotten what it is like to apply for a job. They do not know about that process at all. We need to help people not only to build the skills that they might use in work, but the skills that they need to apply for a job or for several jobs.

So, it is as much about building CVs and interviewing skills as about training and simply having support. I welcome that focus of the Bill. We will see how that operates as the Committee rescutinises the Bill.

11.30 am

I want to talk about the breach of parity. Some Members perhaps do not agree with parity, and the Minister, in her successful bid for her party's leadership, talked about moving away from having Northern Ireland encompassed within the UK social security umbrella. However, I have always believed in maintaining parity with the rest of the United Kingdom, because it provides a safety net for our citizens. We have all worked with the system day in and day out in our constituency work, and some Members have done so professionally in the advice sector. No one would say for a second that the system is perfect. As the Minister herself said, however, it is at times such as this, in the middle of very

difficult economic circumstances, when the benefits that our welfare state provides for our citizens are seen, and that comfort blanket is there for people so that they do not fall through the cracks, or, if they do, they can still be caught with other protections. We should all subscribe to that. Therefore, my party and I take very seriously any breach of parity, whether for one day or one month — indeed, any break of any magnitude — because of the fear that has been instilled in us down the years and certainly over the past three years. I cannot recall how many times, during my membership of the House, I have heard the Minister or officials tell us of the catastrophic consequences that a breach of parity could cause. We were told that the roof would fall in if there was a breach of parity, yet here, because of the delay caused by the Department, there has been a breach of parity.

I accept the Minister's explanation that the breach may well be only technical. "Technical" is one of those euphemistic words that covers a multitude of sins. It appears that a lot of these initiatives and measures kick in somewhat down the line, and we have until October to get the legislation in place. However, I ask the Minister to explain more clearly the consequences of the breach in parity. No Chairperson or member of a Committee would not welcome the opportunity to scrutinise at length and in detail every piece of legislation. However, as the Minister herself acknowledged, every other piece of social security legislation presented to the House in the past three years has gone through by accelerated passage and, therefore, has not been amended by Members.

Although I accept and welcome the Minister's points about operational flexibility, that is the very narrow remit with which we are dealing: it is operational matters, nothing to do with the detail of the legislation and certainly nothing to do with payment levels or new or non-payments. The House and Committee are dealing with a matter of very limited territory. I have to ask, therefore: why the delay; why the breach in parity; and what are the consequences of the breach?

Even though there has been a breach in parity and even though that old fox that we must have parity at all times has been shot, I still hear the Minister talk about the need to maintain parity. Although my party and I certainly agree with keeping parity, we are concerned that there has been a breach, albeit of a technical nature. Nonetheless, there has been a breach, and I

ask the Minister to outline better for the House what the consequences of that may be and, if there was any delay, what the consequences would be after October.

With those remarks as a DUP Member over and subject to the reservations that I have set out as Committee Chairperson and personally, the majority of the Social Development Committee generally welcomes the principles of the Bill. I look forward to the Bill's various stages and the opportunity to scrutinise it in detail and at length but in a timely manner.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I apologise for missing the beginning of the Minister's contribution: I was at a Committee meeting.

It must be realised that the Welfare Reform Bill heralds one of the major changes in benefits since the inception of the welfare state and needs to be scrutinised in detail because of the implications that it will have for those who are reliant on the benefits system. By saying that people must come first, the Minister expressed a noble sentiment about the Welfare Reform Bill. We shall wait and see the eventual outcome of the Bill as it starts to affect people, because work-for-benefits schemes have been mooted in the past, particularly in models based on welfare-to-work programmes in America. However, in the past, such schemes were initially felt to be too prescriptive on claimants and people in the benefits system.

I apologise for repeating some of the issues that have already been covered by the Committee Chairperson and the Minister, but I will start with the issue of lone parents with young children having to be available for work. The lack of a childcare strategy has already been mentioned. The introduction of such a strategy and the proper provision of childcare should not be done in isolation; it should be an interdepartmental initiative.

I am impressed by the Minister's knowledge of child psychology and the age at which children cease to bond with their parents. Seven seems to be the cut-off point. In future, the Bill may reduce that cut-off age to one. What will happen then to the bonding process in children between the ages of one and seven? I am sure that the Minister will give us some idea of that in her summation.

The Bill also makes provision to reform the social fund. It will provide that, at the discretion of an appropriate officer, a payment may instead be made to a third party to provide goods or services. That idea was tried in the 1980s before the social fund was introduced as a replacement for single payments. In my work area at that time, it sometimes led to a monopoly developing with certain providers, and, in some cases, the stigmatisation of social security claimants. Shops actually put up signs stating "DHSS claimants accepted". However, people were reluctant to use those shops because, by doing so, they immediately felt stigmatised in the sense that they were receiving what they might have considered handouts. Some providers of goods specifically touted for social security claimants. In fact, when the social fund was introduced, some retailers in my area went out of business because the social fund was not on a par with the old single payments system.

The Bill provides for benefits sanctions for jobseeker's allowance claimants who, without good cause, fail to attend mandatory appointments in connection with their claim. The Committee heard evidence from the National Autistic Society, and I think that adults with autism and people with mental health problems must be handled sensitively. The Minister for Employment and Learning's expressed interest in providing proper training via, for instance, Disability Action, is to be commended. There will also be sanctions against claimants who act violently or threateningly to staff. That can be very traumatic for staff, but the backgrounds of the perpetrators, who may well have mental health problems, needs to be established.

The Bill mentions lifetime opportunities. Policies are designed, apparently, to improve employment outcomes for disadvantaged groups, such as lone parents and disabled people. It also mentions increased employment, improving individuals' welfare and fostering social inclusion. Work remains the best and most sustainable route out of poverty; it is also good for people's health and well-being. Apart from sounding patronising and aspirational, the Bill provides no evidence that the work mentioned should be suitable, financially beneficial or provide stimulus and satisfaction for the person involved.

The Welfare Reform Bill mentions removing benefit complexity, which can be only good. The

employment and support allowance (ESA) centre that I visited with the Committee was very impressive. The process of taking claims was very good; getting payments out seemed to be the main problem.

The ultimate aim is to have one universal benefit. That will surely lead to more centralisation, the diminution of front line services and, inevitably, job losses in the Social Security Agency. I am sure that the Minister will address those matters in her summation.

Removing income support may well mean that people will have to satisfy more stringent requirements for benefit. If people are to be encouraged back to work, there is an urgent need for a complete overhaul of the tax credit system. For a large number of people, that has proven a complete shambles, with large overpayments being made and challenged, and tax credit offices being virtually uncontactable.

The Welfare Reform Bill is something of a curate's egg: it is good in parts. In its present form, it will be difficult and complex to administer. There are many areas in which parity may simply not be applicable, even though it will be enforced. I am reluctant to say that I have seen it all before, but provisions in the Bill have been considered and tried in the past and were found seriously wanting. As someone once said, it is like *déjà vu* all over again.

Mr Armstrong: I welcome the Bill, which is an opportunity to tackle welfare reform and unemployment in Northern Ireland. However, I am concerned that the reforms do not go far enough. We can be more imaginative in how we effectively address welfare reform. Perhaps the Minister will assure the House that the traditional approach with regard to parity has been taken in respect of the Bill.

The Bill includes a number of clauses to be considered in the months ahead. It is part of the ongoing process of welfare reform and modernisation of the benefits system in Northern Ireland. The Bill consists of three Parts: Social Security; Child Maintenance; and Miscellaneous and Supplementary. The first Part relates to social security and addresses the abolition of income support, supporting parents with young children into employment, community care grants and benefit fraud. The second Part addresses child maintenance and provides for amendments to the current statutory provisions that relate to information offences. The final

Part addresses repeals and revocations of other legislation and the like.

It is likely that the Bill will lift more families out of poverty and potentially assist more people into work in Northern Ireland. The Bill proposes to reform the welfare and benefits system to improve support and initiatives for people to move from benefits into work. In recent months, we have seen redundancies in many businesses and manufacturing industries throughout Northern Ireland. They are happening in ones, twos, tens, and we have even seen hundreds of jobs going in individual companies across Northern Ireland.

Unemployment and redundancy are about much more than statistics. Each of us knows people, constituents, friends and family members who have lost their job and the income for their whole family. Some are struggling to get their first job. Young people are trying to enter the labour market for the first time. Mothers and fathers are struggling to feed and clothe their children, as well as make their rent or mortgage payments. Unemployment is rising faster than at any time in the past 18 years. Youth employment has been particularly badly hit.

Tackling unemployment and the dependency on the benefits system remains central to ensuring that people meet their potential in the workforce and to engendering the positive contribution of individuals to our society. We all know that work is key to physical and mental well-being. It also has a generational impact on the well-being of our children. I look forward to discussion of the Bill in Committee.

Mrs M Bradley: I welcome the Bill. Many points have been raised by various members of the Committee. I am sure that the Minister will address those. I want to know about the flexibility that the Bill allows for. The Minister said that she has considered that matter with the relevant GB Minister and that we will be allowed a bit of flexibility. There is a big difference between Northern Ireland and Britain; look at the habits here and the habits there. We need flexibility. I hope that that happens for the Bill, and I hope that the Minister will be allowed to use her flexibility. I welcome the Bill, I thank the Minister for bringing it to the House, and I look forward to its coming to the Committee.

11.45 am

Ms Lo: I support the principles of the Bill, but I have concerns that many of the sanctions seem to be very draconian. At the beginning of the debate, the Chairperson comprehensively set out the reservations of Committee members. As the Minister said, we need to look at evaluations of the various pilots in England to see whether those sanctions and steps and measures are workable for Northern Ireland. It is not that people do not want to work, but many people here have limited or no qualifications to gain employment. Sometimes they are offered jobs that do not pay them enough, and they are much better off on benefits, so they stay on benefits. Therefore, it is important to give people practical help and support to try to upskill them to make them employable. It is not just the responsibility of the Department for Social Development. There must be joint working with the Department of Education and the Department for Employment and Learning to help people to get the necessary qualifications so that they can work.

As other Members have said, work provides people with self-esteem and better mental health. There is a lot of apprehension in the community about the various steps in the Bill, and lone parents in particular are concerned. Mickey Brady was right to point out to the Minister that the Bill aims to bring lone parents back to work when their children are one year old. I have two children and a stepson, and I know that I would not have wanted to be forced to leave a one-year-old baby in the house while I went out to work, particularly when many neighbourhoods in Northern Ireland do not have affordable and accessible childcare. We have seen a decline in the number of childminders, which is forcing people to leave their little ones at home with a childminder who may not be appropriate. That is a great concern for me and for the community and society.

Some sanctions, such as child maintenance, sound quite incredible to me. With my background in community work and social work, I have always had a strong view that non-resident parents should pay maintenance so that their children will not be deprived. However, following successful piloting in Great Britain, the Bill will allow the administrative disqualification of non-resident parents from holding or obtaining a driving licence. That will make people lose their job, and that will not

help anybody, least of all the child. We will need to look carefully at the outcomes of the various pilots in England. The Bill will also create an offence relating to failure to disclose a change of circumstances by a non-resident parent. I agree with that, but it seems very negative to take away a person's driving licence.

I ask the Minister to be careful. I welcome her decision to breach parity, although I share the Committee Chairperson's concerns. I welcome also the period that the Committee has for more detailed scrutiny of the Bill.

Mr Easton: I generally welcome the reforms laid out in the Welfare Reform Bill, but I have some issues, which I will outline towards the end of my speech.

I welcome the "work for your benefit" scheme. It is not about people being forced to earn their benefits, but about providing them with the experience that will help them to get a job. Many people who are on jobseeker's allowance and other work-related benefits have been on them for some time, and the longer they have been out of work, the greater an obstacle it becomes for them when filling in a job application form. The scheme will, therefore, be beneficial to those on unemployment-related benefits in that it will help them to gain practical work experience, and I look forward to the results of the pilot scheme on the mainland.

The extension of certain DLA payments to the visually impaired has to be welcomed, as many people have been disenfranchised under the current system. I welcome also the change in how the payment of community care grants will be made. They will go directly to the suppliers of goods and services. That will ease the burden on those in need and, hopefully, make the delivery of services smoother. I welcome the introduction of payments on account for benefit claimants, as well as the introduction of sanctions against benefit fraudsters, including those who have been convicted or cautioned for violence against benefit staff and claimants who fail to attend mandatory interviews. We must stamp out fraud where we can.

I welcome the introduction of exemptions from job-seeking conditions for victims of domestic violence. That is an acceptance of the genuine reasons why some people may not be able to get into a job. I welcome also the consideration of a child's well-being when looking at parents' benefits.

I do, however, have some concerns and queries about a number of issues in the Bill relating to the migration of income support claimants to jobseeker's allowance and employment and support allowance. I am concerned about the impact that that may have on lone parents, many of whom receive income support while raising and caring for their family. Lone parents have the right to spend time with their children in the absence of the second parent, so what does the Minister propose to do to protect them?

I am also concerned about the requirement for certain lone parents and partners of benefit recipients to undertake action planning and work-related activity as a condition for the continued receipt of benefits. Lone parents should have the support of the state, when they feel it is necessary, in raising their children. I would like clarification of the requirements for certain employment and support allowance claimants to undertake work-related activities. Who does that relate to? Furthermore, what social security matters within the Department for Employment and Learning does the Minister intend to contract out? From my experience, I know that contracting out causes problems, including delays and poor communication. Those receiving benefits, therefore, experience undue stress and hassle when seeking those benefits. I would also like to query the introduction of work focus interviews for claimants who are aged between 60 and 65. Why is that group receiving special attention?

Overall, reform in our social security system is needed, but at its centre are the claimants who, for whatever reason, are receiving state support. The system was created to support people, not to cause a hindrance or distress. It is, therefore, important that we get these things right, because, after one set of reforms comes through, we will need to change them, according to the experience of those who are in receipt of benefits. I will continue to monitor the Bill, and some changes may well have to be made at a later stage.

Mr F McCann: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle, Minister agus a chairde. A lot has been said about welfare reform already, and I know that the Bill will go to the Committee for scrutiny. I will raise several points about what I believe the impact of the changes will be on our communities in the coming period.

Since the Bill's introduction, Sinn Féin has raised many concerns about the impact that it will have on those who, because of ill health or lack of employment, find themselves claiming benefits. In the past, my colleague Mickey Brady said that he fears that we are heading towards a universal benefit, which will make it more difficult for people to access benefits. Benefits should not be about stopping people claiming their entitlements but about ensuring that those who need help can avail themselves of it without their motives for making a claim being questioned. It is amazing that, every time there is a change to the benefit system, we are informed that such changes are aimed at making it easier for people to make claims, when in fact the opposite is often the case. Many people believe that such changes are more about forcing people to come off certain benefits than about ensuring that they can access the benefit system.

Close to 110,000 people across the North are in receipt of incapacity benefit. Many people in the voluntary and community sector believe that the decisions to change the name of that benefit to employment and support allowance and to introduce work-related interviews will lead to a serious reduction in the number of claimants. In fact, it has been said that targets already exist to halve the number of people who claim incapacity benefit. That would result in a reduction of some 50,000 claimants. What is laughable about those changes is the push to get people back to work when what is not explained is where the jobs are to be found.

We have argued about conducting job-related interviews and how people with mental health problems, those who suffer from autism or those with other serious problems are being treated. There is a particular concern about people with learning or educational difficulties. It is all right to say that staff have been trained to deal with all eventualities, but, from the feedback that we are getting from departmental staff and the many support organisations that represent those who suffer from various difficulties, that does not seem to be the case. There can be serious consequences not only for claimants but for staff who are forced into the position of having to deal with someone who has serious problems. Such members of staff may be unable to recognise that the claimant is having difficulties. I appeal to those groups and individuals to take part in the Committee Stage of the legislative process.

Several weeks ago, the Committee for Social Development visited the headquarters of the processing of claims for employment and support allowance. I have to say that we were impressed by the commitment of the staff and management at that processing centre. However, problems still remain. In the past week, from my office, I phoned a number that was provided to elected representatives, but it took up to 25 minutes to get through. However, when I eventually did get through, the staff dealt with the query effectively.

My colleague Mickey Brady covered other issues, including effective training for staff and how the changes will impact on lone parents, especially given the lack of effective childcare provision.

We also have serious concerns about the use of sanctions, such as the removal of benefits for the most trivial reasons. Many people have been left without payments for many weeks with no other means of survival. Changes to the social fund will make it more difficult for people to access benefits and, in particular, interest-free loans, which many people rely on to clothe their family at various times of the year. The change will have serious consequences and will force people into the waiting arms of unscrupulous moneylenders who charge huge interest rates. Therefore, the changes will impact on people's ability to survive and provide.

Although we are tied to parity, I would be in no rush to implement some elements of the legislation. We have the ability to administer the benefit system so that it helps rather than hinders people. We should remember that circumstances are not the same here as in England. We live in a low-pay society in which many essentials are more expensive. As I said, where are the jobs to ensure that people go from benefits to employment? Let us not fool ourselves: the implementation of certain provisions in the Welfare Reform Bill could have detrimental consequences for many of our citizens.

Alex Easton spoke about sanctions. I understand and appreciate what the Minister said about anyone who issues any type of threat against staff or resorts to violence being subject to sanctions. However, many people who, for whatever reason, forgot to turn up for an interview have had their benefits suspended for anything from one week to eight weeks. During that period, they have to rely on family or friends to survive.

If people are forced down that road, the system must be wrong. We continually talk about the impact that crime has on our society, yet we are forcing people into positions in which they are being sanctioned. They may have nobody to turn to when it comes to feeding and clothing themselves or when it comes to socialising. That needs to be taken into consideration when we are looking at how sanctions are being administered across the board.

12.00 noon

The Minister for Social Development: I thank the Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development, Simon Hamilton, and all the Members who spoke. I listened to Members' points carefully, and I trust that I will be able to address any concerns that they might have. If I do not fully answer the issues that they have raised, I will write to them after a full examination of the Hansard report.

Mr Hamilton asked about the consequences of the delay to date for individuals in Northern Ireland. That brings us back to the technical issue, and principle, of parity. I assure the Member that the delay to date has no consequences for individuals in Northern Ireland. The main impact is that adult dependency increases here will not be abolished from April 2010.

The Chairperson also mentioned the work for your benefit programme, which is designed to provide the long-term unemployed with work experience and training to enable them to be in a better position to find work. We should always exhort and encourage people, and I would like all officials to be in that frame of mind so that they can be particularly sympathetic to all claimants' needs while encouraging them to find work. I take on board the fact that that is difficult during an economic recession. Nevertheless, every effort should be made to help people.

The exact form of the work for your benefit programme will become clear after the pilot schemes in Britain have been evaluated. Members should remember that I said, during the Second Reading of the Bill, that I had certain reservations and concerns. In July 2009, I put those reservations to Minister of State at the Department for Work and Pensions Jim Knight. Consequently, I was allowed to bring about operational flexibility, which makes Northern Ireland that bit different and reflects its special circumstances. Other issues in

relation to the work for your benefit programme will be considered in conjunction with the Department for Employment and Learning.

Mr Hamilton also mentioned income support, which will be abolished only when arrangements have been made to transfer claimants to other suitable benefits. There is no timescale for that. Carers will not be moved until suitable arrangements for them have been put in place.

The Chairperson and Mr Brady mentioned lone parents. I am very well aware that childcare is an issue in Northern Ireland, particularly in rural communities, where the same access to childcare is not available. Childcare is a matter for other Ministers around the Executive table, so I hope that Members will encourage their colleagues to do everything possible to ensure that adequate provision is put in place, particularly with respect to early-years partnerships. That is why, given the difficulties with that matter, I got the approval of the Minister of State at the Department for Work and Pensions to introduce extra flexibility.

Mr Brady: Will the Minister give way?

The Minister for Social Development: I will come back to Mr Brady in a minute.

It will be at least two years before the changes set out in the Bill are introduced here. Therefore, there should be time to look at all of this and make a start on dealing with the childcare issue. In any event, no lone parent will be sanctioned — I do not like sanctions — if suitable and affordable childcare is not readily available. In fact, I also gave that assurance with respect to other social security legislation. I am particularly concerned about the level of childcare, but it is within the remit of other Ministers.

Mr Brady: I thank the Minister for giving way. During my previous employment, about seven years ago, academics carried out a survey of social services in the Mourne area, which is part of the Minister's constituency, showing that the area had the worst childcare provision in western Europe, with some five registered childminders. That must be addressed urgently. I said in my speech that it is an interdepartmental issue.

The Minister for Social Development: I hear what Mr Brady says. It would be useful if the appropriate Minister brought forward the policy

that the early-years partnership has sought for a considerable time in that area. That would address the issue. I am aware of childcare provision in south Down; in fact, preschool and nursery provision is offered by groups throughout the constituency. Therefore, I want to correct that point. There is a need for the early-years partnership policy, which was promised some three years ago, to be published.

Mr Brady: Will the Minister give way?

The Minister for Social Development: No. I will not take any more interventions.

Mr Brady mentioned the social fund. Detailed arrangements are still under consideration. The objective will always be to get the best value for the money that is spent and to provide the best possible service to claimants. The central issues are service, assistance and help. I want to put that on record.

Simon Hamilton and Mickey Brady mentioned sanctions, which I raised with the Minister of State because of my concern about the matter. I was assured that sanctions will be used only as a last resort.

Mr Brady raised the issue of working tax credits in the context of the Bill. I am rather surprised that he does not know that that is a taxation matter and is, therefore, for the Inland Revenue and the Chancellor of the Exchequer. It does not belong in the Bill. I return to the fundamental political point that one must be in Westminster, where fundamental decisions about social security and taxation are taken.

Mr Brady: Change party then.

The Minister for Social Development: No. That is a simple fact. Members who choose to ignore it should take a lesson on the matter.

Mr Brady also said that universal benefit leads to centralisation and referred to the reduction of staff in Social Security Agency branches. I suppose that the Welfare Reform Bill is part of a move towards simplifying the benefits system. We are moving towards a benefit for people who can work and another for those who are prevented from working by illness or disability. I am anxious that we provide every assistance, empathy and sympathy to those who encounter difficult circumstances. I have told officials emphatically that they must be, and I believe that they are, sympathetic to people's circumstances.

I assure Members that there is no intention to reduce the number of staff in Social Security Agency offices as a result of the Bill. However, we are in a difficult financial climate. I am conscious, as, I am sure, is Mr Brady, that staff work under particularly difficult circumstances because of higher live load: a higher number of people are claiming. Members are aware of that because people who are in difficult circumstances come into our constituency offices: people encountering poverty who have never been in that situation before. I have told my officials that they must be particularly helpful, sympathetic and empathetic to those people's needs.

Billy Armstrong and Anna Lo raised the issue of driving licences. That proposal was dropped. In fact, in July 2009, I told Mr Knight, who is the appropriate Minister in Britain, that I would not go ahead with it and that I wanted flexibility to ensure that it was dropped, which it was.

Lack of qualifications is a matter for the Minister for Employment and Learning. I will ensure that any issues that relate to employment and skills, which are his responsibility, are referred to him. I will ask him to respond to Members appropriately.

Mr McCann raised the issue of whether the staff would be trained to deal sympathetically with customers at all times. The answer is yes. I would like to think that all our staff deal with people sympathetically, because that is the very least that we expect when we deal with people. We want to deal with people on a human, sympathetic basis. I have instructed staff that they must take on board the needs of those who may be meeting difficult financial circumstances for the first time, and others who have ongoing financial difficulties. We must be particularly sympathetic, because we meet such people regularly in our constituency offices, on the streets and, perhaps, in our own families.

There are those who say that benefit claimants have responsibilities, as well as rights. However, it has always been my contention that many who have problems with their benefits are in dire straits. We have to take that into account and be particularly sympathetic, and I have instructed staff to do so. People do not decide to apply for benefits lightly; they do so because they are in financial distress.

Alex Easton raised the issue about the power to direct claimants to undertake specific

work-related activity. I assure the Member that personal advisers will always encourage, persuade and support people to take up work-related activity, which is considered necessary, before considering requiring someone to undertake a particular activity. If someone consistently fails to engage effectively with the personalised support arrangements, two situations are envisaged whereby an adviser may be able to require someone to undertake a specific activity. For example, where there is a significant barrier to work that the claimant has been encouraged to address, but has failed to do so, discretion will be used as to whether the claimant is directed into the specific work-related activity straight away or allowed the period between work-focused interviews to comply voluntarily with the suggestion before a formal direction is given. Additionally, action may be required when a claimant may have failed to meet his or her general work-related activity requirement without due cause.

I would like to think that we can be as sympathetic as possible. I am conscious of the fact that we are in difficult financial circumstances, that we are in an economic recession, and that the number of jobs available in certain areas is not what is used to be. However, I would like to think that all of us in the Chamber will provide every opportunity for everybody, through our words and through our actions, and that we will use every opportunity to ensure that people are dealt with sympathetically and that every form of skill and training will be available to those who want it and who want to be encouraged.

Ms S Ramsey: Will the Minister give way?

The Minister for Social Development: I am nearly finished, so I want to continue and to conclude. I hope that I have addressed all the points that have been raised. I will read Hansard carefully and if any Member has raised an issue that I have failed to address or that needs to be dealt with in more detail, I will write to that Member. Suffice to say that I, too, have reservations, which I raised with the appropriate Minister in GB last year. I look forward to the work of the Committee. I have given it the opportunity to scrutinise the Bill line by line, and I want Committee members to come back to me with the particular issues that they have raised. I want to ensure that every possible aspect will be dealt with. I urge Members across the Chamber to ensure that their ministerial

colleagues who have responsibility for childcare fulfil their obligations in every possible way, rather than take out little daggers at DSD.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Second Stage of the Welfare Reform Bill [13/09] be agreed.

12.15 pm

Revised Programme of Expenditure 2010-11

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to two hours for this debate. The Minister will have up to 10 minutes to propose the motion and 20 minutes to make a winding up speech. All other Members who wish to speak will have five minutes.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr S Wilson): I beg to move

That this Assembly approves the revised programme of expenditure proposals for 2010-11 as set out in the Budget laid before the Assembly on 13 April 2010.

Last Tuesday, I presented the Executive's revised Budget proposals for the financial year 2010-11, following the period of consultation on the draft proposals from the review of the 2010-11 spending plans. Today, on behalf of the Executive, I am seeking the Assembly's approval for those plans.

The supporting document that I published last week provides details of the consultation process and the Executive's response to it. As only a limited amount of time has been set aside for the debate, I will not go over all the issues or the individual allocations to Departments. However, I want to emphasise a few key points on the Executive's revised plans for Members to consider in advance of the vote on the motion.

The 2010-11 Budget allocations for Northern Ireland Departments were first determined as part of the Budget process in 2007. The plans were based on the phased introduction of water charges for domestic consumers, a freeze in the domestic regional rates and a delivery of significant capital receipts by Departments. However, since those plans were agreed by the Executive and approved by the Assembly in January 2008, the economic landscape has changed substantially. Some will suggest that those changes could have been predicted, but it is worth noting how unreliable some of the economic forecasts made at that time have turned out to be. For example, in 2007 Treasury projections were for the UK economy to grow by 2·7% in 2009-2010, yet, in reality, it shrunk by 3·7%. In addition, UK unemployment was projected to remain at under the one million

mark in 2010, yet the actual figure is some 700,000 higher.

Since the Executive proposals were approved in 2008, a number of spending pressures have emerged, including the Civil Service equal pay claim, which amounted to £160 million, and the Northern Ireland share of the £5 billion additional public expenditure savings expected of UK Departments this year, which amounts to £122·8 million. In addition, the improved spending performance of local Departments since the restoration of devolution has meant that it was prudent for the Executive to revise their planning estimates of the starting level of overcommitment. However, the most significant cost pressure facing the Executive in 2010-11 relates to the deferral of the introduction of domestic water charges, which will cost £200 million.

As a consequence of those and other changes, the Executive were faced with a net spending pressure of £217·1 million in current expenditure and £149·9 million in capital investment spending. In response, the Executive's draft proposals, which I launched for consultation on 12 January 2010, involve a reprioritisation of existing Budget allocations to Departments to deliver additional savings this year. In recognition of the potential impact on front line services, the Executive agreed a targeted approach with the lowest rate of current expenditure savings to be made by the Health Department, due to the importance of health and social care services.

In addition, a lower than average rate of savings is required from the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) and the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL). That reflects the priority afforded in the Programme for Government to growing the economy.

Although I have sought to protect priority services at Executive level, it is also important that individual Departments deliver savings in a manner that has the least possible impact on the services that they provide. One of the best ways to ensure that that happens is for the plans to be subject to public scrutiny, which is why I asked ministerial colleagues to publish their Departments' detailed plans on websites to facilitate consideration by the Assembly and the wider public.

The main form of consultation on the Executive's proposals has been through the Assembly, although adverts were also placed in local

newspapers, inviting comments from the wider public. I am pleased at the level of interest that the Assembly has expressed in the Executive's proposals, which was shown in the take-note debate of 9 February 2010. The motion was tabled by the Committee for Finance and Personnel, which played a key role in the consultation process in co-ordinating the views of all of the Assembly's Statutory Committees.

I had the pleasure of meeting the Committee on 11 February, and I was most grateful for the receipt of the report from the Committee at the start of March. The report raised a number of pertinent and relevant points on the Executive's proposals. In particular, I am glad that the Committee has recognised the scale of spending pressures facing the Executive and that it has agreed in principle with the approach that had been taken in response. However, the Committee expressed concern at the level of engagement by some Departments on their detailed plans. That point was prominent in the take-note debate and in Question Time since then.

I recognise fully the temptation for some Departments and Ministers to adopt the safety-first principle in seeking to avoid criticism by not presenting the full picture to the Assembly and to the wider public. However, that is a short-sighted way of working. Policies can be improved only if departmental proposals are transparent.

In addition to the Assembly's important contribution, 18 responses were received from public interest groups, including business organisations, health and social care bodies, children's groups and organisations representing the interests of women. Although a broad range of issues were raised in the responses, including calls for the levels of savings that are expected in some public services to be reduced, almost no reference was made to the critical issue of how that would be funded.

The one aspect of the Executive's proposals that has been most welcomed by the Assembly is the £26 million of funding for the invest to save fund. Departments have submitted 60 proposals for support from that fund at a cost of just under £90 million. The proposals were first subjected to an assessment in the areas of value for money, deliverability and additionality, and the remaining projects were then ranked in order of the level of projected savings versus the upfront cost in 2010-11.

That resulted in the invest to save allocation, which is set out in detail in the revised 2010-11 spending plans document. It includes £6.5 million for redundancy costs associated with transition to a more streamlined administrative structure in education and £4.8 million for a land measurement improvement project in the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) to reduce the risk of CAP disallowance payments, which have the potential to reach £15 million each year. It includes £3.7 million for the digital dictation project in the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) to reduce the need for administrative support, £1.4 million to fund additional redundancies as part of the restructuring of libraries and £1.4 million to fund the refurbishment of Enterprise trains to increase fuel efficiency.

Apart from invest to save allocations, there has not been a significant change to the overall financial position since January. Most of the revisions to the draft spending plans are due to technical changes and transfers between Departments. That includes a residual amount of funding of just over £100 million for the deferral of water charges that previously had been held centrally.

The other significant change is in respect of the £12.1 million of additional funding made available to the Executive as a result of the Chancellor of the Exchequer's announcement during the UK Budget last month. That additional funding is being held centrally, and it will provide enhanced scope for the Executive to address pressures as part of the 2010-11 in-year monitoring process.

Having agreed with the draft proposals on the level of savings from each Department, the Executive sought to confirm whether that was the correct approach through two separate exercises.

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

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I will try to pick up on some of those points at the end of the debate.

In conclusion, although the focus over the past several months has been on the amount of additional savings that will be required of Departments, the reality is that such issues

are of little direct importance to the people of Northern Ireland.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Time.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: Their main concern is the delivery of services. That requires us to look at not just the amount of money but how it is being spent. That will be one of the jobs of the Committees in the coming year.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel (Ms J McCann): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his opening remarks. When launching the original proposals in January, the Minister asked the Committee for Finance and Personnel to produce a co-ordinated report on the revised 2010-11 spending plans on behalf of all the scrutiny Committees. The Committee was asked to publish its report speedily, either before the end of February or as soon as possible thereafter, in order to provide the Executive with sufficient time to consider the Assembly's views in coming to an agreed final set of spending plans for 2010-11 by the middle of March.

Although there has been some slippage in that regard, I welcome the fact that the revised proposals are now before the Assembly for debate. In order to inform its work, the Committee sought the other Committees' views on the proposals for their respective Departments. It also led a take-note debate on 9 February that gave all Members an opportunity to debate the proposals and shape the Committee's report, which was subsequently agreed on 3 March and issued to the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP).

The Committee recognised the limited options available for addressing the public expenditure pressures for 2010-11, and it endorsed in principle the proposed targeted approach to savings. That said, during evidence sessions with DFP officials and the Minister, the Committee sought to determine the precise methodology that gave rise to the specific percentage savings for individual Departments. Members noted a dearth of supporting information to explain the rationale behind the targeted percentage savings for each Department, and the Committee concluded that all available information should have been included in the review consultation document.

A particular criticism which was evident from the responses received from the Committees, and which was repeatedly raised during the take-note debate, regarded the lack of detailed information available on the plans for the majority of Departments. Seven out of 11 Committees expressed varying levels of dissatisfaction with the shortcomings in the information that their Departments provided. The Committee considered that the lack of detailed information prevented substantive input from the Assembly and the wider public, and it is strongly critical of those Departments that failed to engage properly with their Committees.

Since it published its report on the Executive's draft Budget 2008-2011 in December 2007, the Committee has repeatedly called for the establishment of a formal Budget process. The Committee considers that that would enable the Committees to plan the necessary scrutiny of future Executive Budgets and expenditure, and that it would focus Departments' attention on the need to meet their Committees' requirements. It might also prevent a repeat of the difficulties encountered by the Committees during this mini-budget process. In that respect, the Committee looks forward to receiving a briefing from DFP officials on 12 May on the outcome of DFP's review of the Executive's Budget process 2008-2011, which was originally due for completion by the end of 2008. That should inform the establishment of an effective process for determining future Budgets. It will also enable the Committee to move forward with the second phase of stage 1 of its inquiry into Budget scrutiny, which it aims to complete before the summer recess.

12.30 pm

The Committee also intends to press ahead with stage 2 of its inquiry, which will review the resources available for assisting Statutory Committees and Assembly Members in undertaking budgetary and financial scrutiny and will seek to identify any recommendations necessary to enhance the capacity of the Assembly in that regard. The Committee intends to complete stage 2 of its inquiry in advance of the summer recess.

The Committee for Finance and Personnel remains committed to maximising the Assembly's contribution to the Executive's Budget process and to enhancing the role of the Assembly's Statutory Committees and

Members in budgetary and financial scrutiny. The Committee looks forward to engaging with DFP and with the other Statutory Committees over the coming months and to ensuring that an effective Budget process is established for future years.

At its meeting tomorrow, the Committee will also be taking the opportunity to question DFP officials on the detail of the revised 2010-11 spending plans.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has arranged to meet immediately upon the lunchtime suspension. I therefore propose, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until 2.00 pm.

The sitting was suspended at 12.31 pm.

On resuming (Mr Speaker in the Chair) —

2.00 pm

The Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development (Mr Hamilton): I will begin by making a few comments as the Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development.

The Committee considered the revised departmental expenditure plans for the Department for Social Development on several occasions in January, February and March 2010. I am sure that I will not be the only Committee Chairperson to express my disappointment at the behaviour of Departments — in this case, the Department for Social Development — the lack of detail in the initial departmental submissions and the questions that remain unanswered from subsequent briefings. If our Committees are to be as robust and effective as we know they can be through our participation in them, it is imperative that, when dealing with fundamental issues such as the Budget and the expenditure plans for an incoming financial year, Departments divulge those plans as quickly and fully as possible. Sadly, that was not the case with the information that my Committee received.

I will make a couple of comments based on the information that has been provided and focus on some of the areas where the Committee has concerns about the adjustments that have been made. A primary concern is the Housing Executive's capital improvement programme for 2010-11. The overall reductions to that programme might be as significant as £40 million and could affect many deprived areas and estates throughout Northern Ireland. I would welcome further clarification from the Department for Social Development on the funding for those important capital projects.

The Committee expressed concern initially that the Department was just apportioning 2·6% downward adjustments for each of its business areas, even though the Minister and the Executive did not take that approach. The Committee was concerned that that sort of salami-slicing approach was not particularly effective, and it was concerned about some of the areas that were being hit, such as capital projects and community development. Many members of the Committee are embroiled in their communities and in working to improve those communities, and they are concerned about the effect that the adjustments may have in deprived and disadvantaged communities across Northern Ireland.

In the two and a half minutes that remain available to me, I want to talk about some of the generalities around the revised expenditure plans. Neither I, the Minister nor anyone else speaks with any relish about downward adjustments of any kind. Listening to some Members and their party colleagues, you would think that they were licking their lips at the very thought of making significant cuts to budgets. That is not something that I want to do. However, in accepting what is before us today, we have to recall why we are all here. I am not asking why we are here in an existential sense; I am asking why we are here today dealing with the revised departmental expenditure plans. We are doing that because of decisions that we have taken, decisions that the Executive have taken and decisions that we all agree with. The primary example, as the Minister outlined before the lunchtime break, is the deferral of water charges and the £200 million associated cost. That was a good decision, and it was the right decision at the time. However, it does not come without consequences.

Another example is the resolution of the Civil Service equal pay claim. A resolution to that was something that we all wanted to see and something that Finance Ministers had repeatedly sought to achieve. The present Finance Minister, Mr Wilson, has managed to achieve a resolution. However, that has not come without a cost: some £155 million to £170 million in total, a large chunk of which has to be paid this year. There are also central adjustments that the Minister talked about coming down from Whitehall. Those are all our own decisions; they were all agreed by the Executive and by every party in the Assembly. However, there are consequences for taking those decisions.

I welcome the fact that the adjustments have not been made crudely by apportioning them equally across Departments. Some measure of protection has been afforded to critical services such as health and, in keeping with our objective to grow a dynamic and vibrant economy, there has been a measure of comparative protection for DEL and DETI so that we can try to continue to stimulate growth in our economy.

I also put on record my support for the invest to save scheme. I see that there are some very good, innovative schemes in the finalised plans, which is an overall principle that we all want to see continued. I support the motion.

Mr McNarry: The Minister will be well aware of the difficulties that his Department is causing throughout Northern Ireland. Not having an agreed Budget at this stage of the financial year is unprecedented. Are we carrying out something that is legally safe? Is it not true that legal opinion has been sought by at least one Department and that further legal consideration would give cause for concern with regard to the revised Budget's introduction in the House today? I have some serious reservations about the manner in which the revised spending plans have been brought before the House today.

Section 64(1) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 states:

"The Minister of Finance and Personnel shall, before the beginning of each financial year, lay before the Assembly a draft budget".

Can any of us imagine the Chancellor of the Exchequer or any other Finance Minister throughout Europe missing the deadline for his own Budget, as ours has? I understand that the plans were agreed by the Business Committee on 13 April 2010, some eight days after the end of the financial year. Will the Minister reassure the House that the Budget is legal? Will he also inform the House as to when the revised programme was agreed by the Executive? Along with every other Member, I received a copy of the plans and a letter from the Minister on 12 April 2010. Had the Executive agreed the plans at that stage? It is my understanding that they had not.

Therefore, will the Minister guarantee that we will not have to revisit the plans because they are open to legal challenge? If the process is proven to be unsafe, what is the Minister's fallback position? Has he taken any legal advice on what we are doing today? What advice has he received from the Departmental Solicitor's Office? What is the legal position of the Attorney General, who is the person ultimately responsible for legal direction? Is the Attorney General, John Larkin, in post, or will that pose a problem for the Assembly?

The entire process illustrates a mismanaged Department. The DUP is responsible for the Finance Department. We all know that yesterday it launched its manifesto, which contained a large number of mostly spurious ideas and commitments but absolutely no information on how the party will pay for them. Not surprisingly, given how it has mismanaged

the Finance Department and given the waffle that we will hear at the Dispatch Box later, all fears have been confirmed. The manifesto is a manifesto of waffle that has earned them a deserved reputation as a party of financial mismanagement and fiscal irresponsibility. At a time when the United Kingdom needs serious politicians who have the best interests of the union at heart, what the DUP is offering is simply not good enough. The party will know that on 6 May.

I have posed serious questions to the House and the Minister that deserve serious consideration and response. I have to say, in case the Minister attacks me later, that I might not be here to hear his response because of other commitments. However, I can read the Hansard report. I commend that idea to other Members, who will be able to see the cackling in it. I have raised issues of undoubted importance. Last Thursday, the Ulster Unionist Party's two Executive Ministers, when placed in circumstances that were not to their liking, voted against the revised Budget as an expression of their revulsion, disbelief and discontent at the manner in which the Executive dealt with the revised Budget. I make that statement of intent on behalf of my Ministers and my party. The Minister must recognise that, and I hope that he will do so.

Mr O'Loan: The motion asks the Assembly to approve the revised programme of expenditure proposals for 2010-11. That is not a proposal to which I or my party can give assent, and, if necessary, we shall divide the Assembly on it. That is consistent with the position of my party, which has had great concerns about the budgetary arrangements over the past three years. Unfortunately, I think that our stance has been vindicated.

The document on the Minister's spending plans states:

"There have been a large number of significant changes to the public expenditure environment since the Budget 2008-11 document".

Indeed, it spends a whole chapter outlining those changes. We know the headings such as the overcommitment; the failure of the capital assets realisation programme; the deferment of water charges; and the equal pay issue. Of course, other pressures always arise. This year, two of the larger pressures have been Bombardier and swine flu. However,

no contingency fund or other arrangement has been put in place to address those issues. The document fails to address not only those fiscal issues but the other big change in the environment, namely the economic downturn. We have consistently argued that the Budget ought to have been fundamentally rewritten to address that situation.

Of course, when considering plans for this year, we should be preparing for a future after the Westminster election. Although no one knows what will happen in this financial year, it is almost certain that, for the next financial year, any Government there will be faced with the position of bringing their Budget back into regularity. The consequences here are likely to be considerable.

We feel that the issue of the economic downturn and the building up of our economy has not been adequately addressed. The Minister knows that, and he said that we were not doing enough on the economy. One press statement reports that the Minister will make it clear that:

"it is difficult to see any significant change in policy focus towards economic growth over the last few years."

I can only agree with the Minister, but what is being done in the Budget to address that issue?

2.15 pm

What led the Minister to perform his U-turn on corporation tax? I greatly regret that policy objective's not being achieved. Many of us believed it a key issue in turning our economy around, and it was recently proposed by the Economic Reform Group. Presenting our case is all the more difficult when the Minister is expressing a high level of scepticism. The Minister has not considered a number of corporation tax issues, such as a possible phasing-in of the tax and the fact that the current corporation tax take is very small. We always factored in the cost in our support for that arrangement. Is there not confidence that that policy measure would pay for itself? That was the whole point of the proposed corporation tax policy measure.

The one element of the Minister's paper of which I greatly approve is the invest to save proposal. Given our economic situation and future budget, serious public sector reform must be undertaken. My only complaints about the

invest to save proposal are that it is too meagre and should have happened a considerable time ago. It is too little, too late.

The Minister's officials appeared before the Committee for Finance and Personnel last week and talked only about PEDU.

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

Mr O'Loan: His officials were unable to present any forward work programme for PEDU, which is the Minister's one significant initiative for public sector reform.

Dr Farry: This is my first comment to the House in a different context, given that I am no longer a Member of the loyal opposition. *[Interruption.]* However, the Alliance Party will continue to take a constructively critical view of coming Assembly decisions, although we shall demonstrate the responsibility that comes with being a party on the Executive.

The Executive and the House have an obligation to ensure that we have a Budget in place. There may be issues about the process to date and about whether we should have had three Budgets or a three-year Budget, which we are now modifying. However, those are secondary to issues of substance, such as where we are going with the money. My party leader supported that issue in the Executive. The Budget was inherited, but that support reflects our sense of the importance of moving forward as opposed to an endorsement of the detail, and there will obviously be discussions in the years ahead. I am not going to go down the road of making an election speech. Suffice it to say that I was rather —

Mr Kennedy: I thank the Member for giving way. The Member's introductory remarks remind me of the comment by the late Michael Foot about David Steel on a famous parliamentary occasion, when he said that he had:

"passed from rising hope to elder statesman without any intervening period whatsoever".

Dr Farry: Given my lack of grey hairs compared with those of Mr Kennedy, I am not quite sure about that one. However, I am impressed by the ability of the Conservative Member for Newry and Armagh to quote left-wing socialist firebrands to make his point. I was rather amused to hear the Conservative Party

lambaste other parties for not providing costings in their manifestos.

Mr Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Dr Farry: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. Other parties here are not claiming that they will be part of a future Government; rather, they are trying to influence decisions. However, I note that Mr McNarry's party is intent on forming part of the Government. It may be worth reflecting on the fact that there were no costings in the Conservative manifesto that was unveiled last week.

I want to mention issues on which we have gone wrong in the past and on which we must make progress in the future. There are major distortions in Northern Ireland's public finances. We have talked about the cost of division, a matter about which I will say no more today. The ongoing deferral of water charges has created the major difficulty of where to find the money to meet that loss of revenue. That is on top of the issues that have knocked the Budget off course over the past months, which the Minister outlined.

Looking to the future, Departments are being asked to trim the sails of their public expenditure plans. That may well be a precursor to further rationing. In a sense, it is easy for us to talk about cuts in terms of what will be lost. However, we never get the chance to discuss the missed opportunities — things that we could have done but have been unable to because we do not have the required resources. In some respects, that is the missing link in our current discussions.

I concur with Declan O'Loan's view on the importance of corporation tax as a stimulus to our economy and as a way to find a step change towards closing the productivity gap with the rest of the UK. I disagree with him that the Finance Minister has done a U-turn on the issue: it is more like a 360 degree turn. He has done two U-turns and is now back on board, lobbying for a change in corporation tax that is important to Northern Ireland. It is not a clear missed opportunity in the sense that we must lobby the Treasury to put it in place, but the House should unite on taking the campaign forward.

I also want to stress the importance of the manner in which we address efficiencies in Departments. Far too often, efficiencies mean

cuts to front line services, increased charges levied by Departments or Departments doing less. We need to focus on the true meaning of efficiencies — productivity gain and achieving greater outcomes with less available inputs.

I welcome the concept of the invest to save fund and the initial steps being taken to implement it. In the future, that could become a vehicle for further expansion. Will the Minister consider earmarking a specific percentage of the block grant in years to come for initiatives such as invest to save so that we can encourage innovation? My party believes that areas like the cost of division present clear opportunities to take that forward.

Finally, will the Minister clarify whether there were any changes in the revised public expenditure figures? Are they different to those that were issued in draft for public consultation?

The Chairperson of the Committee for Education (Mr Storey):

As Chairperson of the Committee for Education, I wish first to place it on record that I share the concern of my colleague Mr Hamilton, the Chairperson of the Social Development Committee, about the lack of information provided to Statutory Committees. I refer particularly to the lack of information provided by the Department of Education, despite repeated requests to that Department and its Minister. I note that paragraph 5.5 of the Executive's revised spending plans document comments thus on the level of engagement by Departments with Assembly Committees:

"the Committee for Finance and Personnel highlighted the need for established protocols for the provision of timely and appropriate budgetary information to Assembly committees."

As Chairperson of the Education Committee, I ask this: what protocols have been put in place to ensure that appropriate information is given to Committees so that they can give assistance and advice? Members will recall that one of the current Minister of Education's get-out clauses has been that the Education Committee has not given her any advice. Well, the Committee will give advice on the basis of appropriate information that is provided to it.

The Committee for Education's submission of 5 February to the Committee for Finance and Personnel highlighted why it was not in a position to consider or give its views on a

number of departmental proposals. The Minister of Education identified five areas of potential reductions, but no information was provided on the impact of those reductions. I remind Members of what those five areas were. The first was the reduction in bureaucracy and streamlining of services in relation to education and library boards, the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) and other non-departmental bodies that are serviced by the Department of Education. The second was Classroom 2000 (C2k), which is the computer system in our schools. It has an annual budget in excess of £50 million. We wanted to know what impact a reduction would have on that programme. The third area of potential reduction was the entitlement framework, something which the Education Minister is wedded to and closely associated with. However, she wanted to take almost £5.5 million out of the entitlement framework budget. What impact would that have on the delivery of the entitlement framework, which will be a statutory requirement in 2013? The two other areas identified were the school improvement programme and the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA), which is the organisation that was set up to assess and test —

Mr McCarthy: Does the Member agree that it is totally and absolutely outrageous that the Minister of Education has withdrawn a mere £85,000 from the I CAN early years centre in Ballynahinch, which has deprived 20 young children of speech and language therapy? Those youngsters will not get that service anywhere else. I have seen the good work that has been done at that centre, and the Minister's decision is an absolute disgrace. She should hang her head in shame.

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

The Chairperson of the Committee for Education:

I concur with the Member and his comments about what the Minister should do, and I speak as a Member of the House rather than as Chairperson of the Committee for Education. The Committee has received correspondence in relation to that issue. In a moment or two, I will highlight another situation that is equally disgraceful.

The aim of the convergence delivery plan is to remove duplication and streamline educational services. When that was brought to the

Education Committee, we had not received all of the information. As Chairperson of the Education Committee, I am raising an issue that is probably relevant to other Committees also: there is a delay in having appropriate papers brought to Committees to enable them to scrutinise effectively the work of the Executive. That has to change radically. In respect of the Minister of Education in particular, it has to change big time.

The review of the education capital programme is a very important issue. I remind the House of a statement that impinges on this Budget, which was made by the Education Minister on 27 July 2009 in relation to Whitehouse Primary School, which had been destroyed. I commend the North Eastern Education and Library Board, the school and others for the way in which the school was relocated. A promise was given by the Education Minister, who said:

"My Department is also working to progress the planned new school as quickly as possible and we would hope construction can start later this year."

Now, in 2010, the contracts have run out of time. Not a sod has been turned in relation to Whitehouse Primary School. That situation, along with the one in Ballynahinch, is an absolute disgrace.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel:

Does the Member agree that what makes the situation even more unacceptable is that an Irish-medium school that burnt down at the same time is now practically rebuilt while youngsters in Whitehouse Primary School are left without proper premises?

The Chairperson of the Committee for Education:

I agree with the Member. It is another example of inequality in respect of the delivery of capital projects in the Department of Education.

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

The Chairperson of the Committee for Education:

The bottom line is that the Education Committee should have been in a position to give advice about areas of help. However, appropriate information was not given by the Department to the Committee to make those decisions.

The Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment (Mr Boylan):

Go raibh maith agat,

a Cheann Comhairle. I welcome the opportunity to outline the Committee for the Environment's views on the Department of the Environment's revised expenditure plans for 2010-11.

The Committee was briefed by departmental officials at the start of the year. Members were left in no doubt that the Department faces significant financial pressures.

The £4 million savings required by the Executive, combined with a significant shortfall in planning fees, the cost of planning reform and the review of public administration, result in the Department being called on to make savings of 11.3% in its baseline budget.

2.30 pm

The Committee generally welcomed the Department's proposals for achieving those savings, which include reducing the amount that it spends on consultants, lowering its running costs and reviewing its corporate service functions. Members were pleased to hear that the Department intends to focus its staff cost savings on not filling vacancies in order to avoid the upfront costs involved in rapidly addressing staff numbers. They were also pleased to hear that the Department will bring the Planning Service's operating costs into line with the reduced fees that are now being received. That issue has concerned the Committee for some time.

Planning receipts have been in rapid decline since 2007, and members feel that the Department should have sought to relocate staff to maximise efficiency much sooner. However, Members remain concerned about the impact that that will have on non-governmental organisations, and, since the Committee alerted the House to its concerns during the take-note debate in February, several organisations have been in touch with the Committee to express their concern about cuts that they are facing in funding from the Department. Unlike the Department, those organisations do not have the opportunity to relocate staff, and they will have to make people redundant. That is not just a loss for the organisation; it is a loss for everyone here. It will lead to a loss of expertise from the sector or the region, and possibly even the deterioration of the environment. Some organisations affected by the decision deliver or contribute to statutory environmental protection obligations, and cutting their funding may not be the most cost effective approach in the longer term if it

leads to further deterioration of protected sites and/or EU infraction proceedings.

Mr McCallister: Does the Chairperson agree that funding is a particular issue for the Mourne Heritage Trust? The very issues that he mentioned are very much in evidence when we see the excellent work carried out by the trust around the Mourne and Slieve Croob areas of south Down.

The Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment: I agree with the Member, but we will find that a lot of organisations will lose funding over the next while, and we need to address that. Other organisations provide services to a range of citizens who will be left at a disadvantage in the absence of that funding.

The Department allayed some of the Committee members' concerns by indicating that it is looking at options such as phasing out grants over a longer period and targeting organisations that have a variety of funding streams available to them and are, therefore, not solely dependent on the Department's funding. That is to be welcomed. The Committee also welcomed the fact that the Department is liaising closely with the organisations that are affected, but has asked for details so that the Committee can assess the real impact of the Department's funding cut proposals over time.

The Committee urges the Department to base any decision to cut funding on recent and impartial information about the service or function provided. That must include assessment of the need for a service or function, as well as the value for money that the organisation is providing.

The Committee would also like to see the Department giving an opportunity to organisations to be offered reduced budgets in the first instance, rather than simply cutting grants. That will allow organisations to find ways to survive the current financial constraints and retain expertise both for our citizens and the environment.

Finally, the Committee stressed the importance of using powers afforded by the Audit Office to data match information across Departments and ensure that any receipts for any breaches for which the Department of the Environment has responsibility are maximised. We live in uncertain economic times, and tough measures have to be taken to ensure that savings are made and value for money is being achieved.

The Environment Committee understands that, but it urges the Department to find its savings carefully and with an eye on the longer term. Short-termism now could have a detrimental impact on the environment for many years to come, and it could cost our economy much more in the long run. Go raibh míle maith agat.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety

(Mr Wells): On behalf of the Committee, I should like to point out that we are unable to give a substantive comment in this debate. That is because Minister McGimpsey has still not supplied a detailed breakdown of how he intends to implement the proposed additional savings across his Department. In fact, the situation has not changed since the revised expenditure plans were last debated in the House in February. That is not to say that the Committee has been sitting on its hands on the issue. We took evidence from the Minister and officials, and we wrote to the Minister on a number of occasions regarding the revised expenditure and other budgets, particularly the budget for swine flu. We are still waiting for the Minister to give us his detailed proposals. Four months later, the Committee is still in the dark as to what is happening. Why is the Minister not providing us with the information?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I have listened to the catalogue of concerns that the Member has expressed about the health budget. Does he find it incongruous that, on one hand, the spokesman for the Ulster Unionist Party has talked about the manner in which this budget has been presented, the financial mismanagement and the difficulties that are being caused by lack of information, yet on the other hand, one of the Ministers from his party has not supplied any information to his Committee?

The Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I can say only that it has not been particularly helpful of the Minister to behave in such a manner. The Committee, which has oversight of the largest budget in the Assembly, is unanimous in the belief that this is making its life difficult. We are getting little or no information from the Minister. We know that implementing the revised spending plans without affecting front line services will be difficult, but the total silence from the Department on the issue is worrying.

I know that the Minister publicly took the position that the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety should be exempt from having to make any additional savings — in other words, that his Department should not be subject to the proposed additional savings of £92 million in revenue and £21.5 million in capital funding. The issue, however, has moved beyond the point where there was ever the slimmest possibility of that happening. The delay from the Minister is causing problems and issues in the health and social care community. It is creating uncertainty and a vacuum, in which all sorts of stories and scaremongering are occurring. That is not responsible leadership on behalf of the Department and Minister.

In the past few months, the Committee has received numerous letters and correspondence from a wide range of groups involved in the health and social care sector. As a Committee, as individual members and as MLAs, we have also met, formally and informally, with such groups. All such groups are focusing their energies on funding, trying to make a case for their speciality and defending that case. They are trying to make the case for protecting the funding of stroke victims, heart attack patients, children in care, people with eye problems and people who are looking for help with the elderly, for instance.

Let me make it clear: there is considerable worry in the community about next year's health and social care funding, and that worry is exacerbated by the total lack of information and by bad news stories such as those relating to increases in waiting lists.

The Committee intends to start to look at the strategy for acute hospitals across Northern Ireland. Even that piece of work is dependent on information on funding. Rumours are rife about whether this or that hospital is to be built or to remain open. We need information and answers as soon as possible.

Mr Kennedy: Turn over the page.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety: This certainly cramps my style.

We are into the 2010-11 financial year. Do the health and social care trusts know what their budgets will be? How can they plan and deliver effectively and efficiently in such circumstances? Initially, the Committee

had some sympathy and understanding for the pressures facing the Minister and the health and social care sector; it understands that demand is increasing and that funding is limited. However, any sympathy and understanding for the job that the Minister is doing is slowly eroding as we continue to look into the black hole of no information.

The situation is not good enough; something has to be done. I understand that the Committee for Finance and Personnel is undertaking an inquiry into the role of the Northern Ireland Assembly in scrutinising the Executive's Budget and expenditure. I urge that Committee to consider ways in which information flow can be secured. It is not acceptable to allow Departments to totally ignore their Statutory Committees and not provide information. We need some teeth, some way in which the Minister has to be accountable to the Committee on this important issue.

The Chairperson of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy

First Minister (Mr Kennedy): I welcome the opportunity to address the House on this issue. The Minister of Finance and Personnel launched a consultation on the outcome of the Executive's review of the 2010-11 spending plans in the Assembly on 12 January. The Executive proposed a reduction to OFMDFM's budget allocation in 2010-11 of £4.1 million of current expenditure, which is a reduction of 5%, and a reduction of £5.2 million in capital investment, which represents a 30% reduction.

At the outset, I wish to express the Committee's concern that due to the late receipt of proposals from the Department — there seems to be a theme emerging here — the Committee was unable to scrutinise fully the Department's proposals for reductions in the 2010-11 financial year. The Committee did not receive the Department's proposals until after the take-note debate on Tuesday 9 February, which left the Committee little opportunity to consider the Department's proposals in detail.

Officials from OFMDFM briefed the Committee on their proposals for reductions in the 2010-11 financial year on Wednesday 10 February, after which we highlighted our concerns, including the timescales for decisions regarding the Civic Forum and when an international relations strategy will be developed. The Committee regards this strategy — *[Interruption]*.

Mr Speaker, it appears that some Members regard the affairs of south Down as more important than the uniquely and distinctly important speech of the Chairperson of the OFMDFM Committee. *[Laughter.]* I have been accused of making moving speeches, but none quite as moving as this.

The Committee regards that strategy as an important tool for promoting Northern Ireland in Europe, North America and elsewhere.

The Committee also noted the Department's work to address the number of appeals that come before the Planning Appeals Commission; the figure is down from 2,800 to 943. However, we remain concerned about whether the commission has sufficient staffing resources and funding to handle the substantial number of area plans and article 31 inquiries outstanding.

The Committee also received a briefing from the Office of the First Minister and the deputy First Minister on 14 April 2010 on its organisational restructuring, which will reduce the number of posts in the Department by 51 and which, when fully implemented, will deliver projected savings of £1.5 million in administration costs and £0.3 million in resource costs. The Committee awaits further information from the Department on that issue.

On behalf of the Committee, I place on record its concern over the continuing late receipt of financial papers from the Department, as that delay restricts the Committee's ability to fulfil its scrutiny function.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr McElduff): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. The Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee took evidence from departmental officials on the proposed revised budget for 2010-11 at a meeting on Thursday 28 January. The Committee was disappointed that, as a percentage, the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) suffered the highest cuts of all Departments. The Committee is of the view that DCAL is sometimes regarded as a soft target for budgetary cuts because the impact of its business areas is not fully recognised or understood.

2.45 pm

The Committee makes the point that investment in DCAL business areas contributes to key areas of economic growth, such as cultural

tourism and the creative industries. Such activities have the potential to generate jobs and attract tourists to this region. However, the Committee welcomes the recent news that there will be an increase of £1.4 million to the Department's budget under the invest to save programme. I understand that that money will be ring-fenced to allow Libraries NI to embark on its third tranche of redundancies, which are required at middle management level to realise the long-term savings that were made possible by the creation of a single library authority this time last year. That is a positive step that will, ultimately, deliver better value for money.

The Committee has a number of concerns about the consultation process for the revised Budget. The Committees were afforded limited time in which to scrutinise the cuts that their Departments were proposing. The majority of DCAL's budget is distributed by arm's-length bodies: more than 80% of its functions are delivered in that way. One such body, Sport NI, will lose £2 million. How can Sport NI deliver the Sport Matters strategy with the loss of £2 million?

The Committee would, of course, have preferred a longer consultation period in which to obtain from those bodies thorough and detailed information on how the cuts will impact on their ability to deliver front line services. The Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure joins other Committees in requesting that, in future, the Executive set out a Budget process that allows for proper and considered engagement between Committees and Departments.

The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Regional Development (Miss McIlveen):

I welcome the opportunity to speak in today's debate. The Committee for Regional Development has presented its concerns about funding levels for structural road maintenance at every available opportunity. As Members will be aware, the Snaith review, a recent independent review of structural road maintenance, found that £108 million a year was needed to maintain the structural integrity of the entire road network at good-practice resurfacing frequencies. Structural maintenance spend for 2009-2010 was around £85 million, which was £23 million below the recommended level. That £23 million underfunding is additional to the existing £700 million backlog in structural maintenance.

Underfunding of structural maintenance cannot continue. The quality of our road network underpins Northern Ireland's competitive position, enhancing journey time and reliability for businesses, bringing tourists from our ports and airports to the wide variety of leisure and cultural attractions throughout Northern Ireland and ensuring access to healthcare, education, training and employment opportunities for all our citizens.

The final impact of this year's prolonged periods of severe winter weather has yet to be quantified. However, it is clear that the condition of our roads has deteriorated seriously over recent months. Prioritising the economy means prioritising structural road maintenance, and the Committee for Regional Development is calling for additional in-year funding to at least the £108 million recommended by the Snaith review, together with allocations to address the backlog of more than £700 million.

The Committee is aware that additional allocations have been made to the Department for Regional Development (DRD) for the provision of water and sewerage services, and it will schedule more detailed briefings from the Department on the final revisions to the Executive's spending plans, including the funding of water and sewerage services. However, I am taking this opportunity to reiterate the Committee's view that the funding of water and sewerage services is a matter for the Executive and must not have a detrimental effect on DRD's budget and its ability to deliver much-needed investment in roads and public transport.

Spending on public infrastructure, such as roads and public transport, has been shown internationally to support and stimulate growth across the whole economy. Such investment is never more cost-effective than during a period of economic downturn. The Committee has commissioned a research paper on that subject, which is available on the Assembly's website, and it will support continued infrastructure investment to ensure that Northern Ireland is in the best place possible to take advantage of the recovery when it comes.

Finally, the level of engagement in revising the Executive's expenditure plan for next year has been far from perfect. As the Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Regional Development, I welcome the Executive's recognition of the need to consider that as

part of the Budget 2010 process and look forward to the speedy development of a clearer Budget cycle that also allows adequate time for meaningful engagement between Committees and Departments.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning (Mrs D Kelly): I

welcome the opportunity to participate in the debate. The spending review is tremendously important to all people. It is vital that they see that the issues that surround it are discussed on the Floor of the Assembly.

At its meeting on 27 January 2010, the Committee for Employment and Learning was briefed by departmental officials on details of the impact of the review of the 2010-11 spending plans on the Department for Employment and Learning's budget. The Committee questioned the departmental officials and discussed issues that arose from that.

At its meeting on 3 February, the Committee agreed a response to the Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel to inform that Committee's report on the spending review. My comments will be based on that response. Generally, the Committee believes that the Department has put a positive slant on the spending review by emphasising that cuts had to be made from what is termed "growth" — that is, increased budget allocation — rather than a baseline budget projection. It confirms that it will still be able to deliver on public service agreement (PSA) targets and Programme for Government key goals. Obviously, the Committee will want to hold the Department to account in the delivery of those targets.

The total spending reduction is £28.7 million, of which savings of £19.7 million are to be made from current revenue expenditure and £9 million from the capital expenditure budget. I would be pleased to hear what the Minister had to say if the Assembly or the Executive tried to put money into infrastructure projects in order to kick-start the construction industry: how would that sit with that Executive objective? Current expenditure and capital cuts will be made primarily from the higher education budget, with a cut of £12.8 million to be made from the current expenditure budget, which is 65% of the total of £19.7 million; and £8.1 million from capital expenditure, which is 90% of the total of £9 million.

The Committee has received representations from the higher education sector about the outcome of the spending review and has responded to them. There are no planned cuts to further education. However, that depends on £10 million being realised as capital receipts. The Committee commends the Minister for the considerable sums that his Department has invested in the sector in recent years. It is pleased to see that that investment is being protected.

However, at lunchtime, I returned from a meeting on programme-led apprenticeships at which key stakeholders, such as departmental officials, representatives from the further education sector and employers' representatives, were present. Concerns were raised about whether programme-led apprenticeships are the right way forward. The further education representatives were clear that uptake in that sector has risen quite considerably. They questioned whether there are sufficient funds to deliver and to meet the needs of young people who join up and seek places on those apprenticeships because of the lack of employment opportunities elsewhere.

During discussions at a previous meeting, the Committee also raised the following concerns. As regards current expenditure, it is acutely aware of the importance of the delivery of skills and training, particularly the value of apprenticeships. Members expressed concern that budget cuts of £6 million would impact on the programme-led apprenticeship schemes. However, we received assurances from officials that the remaining increase in funding of £17.4 million would protect training services. I am sure that the debate on the value of programme-led apprenticeships will continue in meetings during the next few weeks.

As regards capital expenditure, the strategic capital investment fund for universities and university colleges has been reduced from £14 million to £5.9 million. Members were concerned about how that would impact on universities' future expansion plans, which have been outlined to the Committee recently. Officials made it clear that that funding was the only area of the higher education budget that had not yet been formally committed. On that basis, the Committee has accepted that it would have a more limited immediate effect on the development of higher education.

As I indicated, the Committee welcomed the lack of cuts that are planned for the further education sector. However, it expressed concern that that depends critically on planned capital receipts of £10 million being fully realised.

Officials outlined the possible impact on ongoing further education projects that would have to be scaled back. Generally, the Committee believes that the Minister for Employment and Learning and his officials have made a considered effort to minimise the impact of the spending review, which Committee members support. However, they will seek to scrutinise and hold the Department and the Minister to account on the delivery of the PSA targets and the Programme for Government goals.

Mr Speaker: Question Time will commence at 3.00 pm. This debate will continue after Question Time, when the Minister will respond and conclude the debate. The sitting is, by leave, suspended until 3.00 pm.

The sitting was suspended at 2.55 pm.

On resuming (Mr Speaker in the Chair) —

3.00 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Social Development

Mr Speaker: To give the House some advance notice, I advise Members that Question 4 has been withdrawn.

Urban Regeneration: Shared Space

1. **Dr Farry** asked the Minister for Social Development to outline her Department's efforts to promote shared space within urban regeneration projects. (AQO 1077/10)

The Minister for Social Development

(Ms Ritchie): The creation of shared space and ultimately a shared future permeates the work of my Department. I have placed the issue at the heart of all my endeavours as Minister for Social Development. In urban regeneration, it takes the form of creating physical developments that are open and welcoming to all.

My Department is taking forward approximately 50 master plans and up to 70 public realm schemes across Northern Ireland's towns and cities. As a core objective, the work aims to make public spaces attractive and safe and create spaces in which people can live, work and relax whatever their background or section 75 grouping. It means the creation of animated spaces and opportunities for events and celebrations that bring people together and promote interaction.

In deprived areas, which are the focus of neighbourhood renewal, the creation of a shared future is an important priority. We cannot move forward with tackling disadvantage in our most deprived communities without making them safer and more welcoming for all. To achieve that goal, my Department meets and engages with community groups throughout Northern Ireland. However, the work on a shared future cannot be done alone, and my Department works in partnership with other central government Departments and agencies including the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, which takes the lead on the issue. The Department also works

with its partners in local government and the voluntary and community sector to progress the community development and physical regeneration work that is within the remit of DSD.

Dr Farry: I thank the Minister for her answer. I was pleased that she recognised that shared space is more than just an issue for Protestants and Catholics and is much more wide-ranging. Will the Minister confirm whether work is being done to find an agreed definition of shared space across Departments? Furthermore, the Minister detailed the various partners she and her Department are working with. Is she also working with DOE and DRD, with their respective responsibilities for planning and roads, to ensure that they interact with her Department and others to make shared space work? The concept cuts across departmental lines.

The Minister for Social Development:

I shall take the second part of the Member's supplementary question first: my Department already works with the Planning Service — and the DOE per se — in the development of master plans, public realm work and regeneration generally. The first part of the Member's supplementary question dealt with the definition of a shared future. For me, that is very definitely about shared space, developing reconciliation and moving on to that new phase in politics. I was disappointed with the draft cohesion, sharing and integration strategy document, which is all that OFMDFM has produced in that area after three years of doing nothing. The document is completely devoid of any proposals and is perhaps one of the worst documents I have ever seen. I am going to do my best to get a shared future back on track, because I am perhaps the only Minister to have done anything to promote shared space and a shared future.

[Interruption.]

Mr Speaker: Order.

The Minister for Social Development: Building a shared future is the biggest challenge for everyone in the Assembly, the Executive and the wider community of Northern Ireland.

Mr Ross: Shared space in urban regeneration, which was the subject of the original question, is not welcomed by everyone in society. Those who are blind or visually impaired worry, in particular, about town centres having shared spaces without kerbs, as they find it difficult to differentiate between pedestrian spaces and those used by traffic.

Mr Speaker: The Member should come to his question.

Mr Ross: Will the Minister ensure that the shared space concepts that she is involved in will not create no-go areas for those who are blind or visually impaired?

The Minister for Social Development: I ensure the Member that the Department has worked in strenuous ways with, for example, people in Belfast City Centre Management to develop shared spaces for those with disabilities and visual impairments. Indeed, the Department facilitated the creation of disabled parking spaces in the provision of public realm.

Reference was made to the issue of shared space, and it may be worthwhile for the Assembly to note that I am wholeheartedly committed to my Department's ongoing work in creating shared spaces and, in particular, a shared future. For example, through the integrated development fund, my Department contributed £500,000 to a £1.2 million commercial community facility that rests on the interface between the Suffolk and Lenadoon estates in west Belfast. That is one way in which we can create a shared space. It may interest the Member for North Down Dr Farry to know that we are working strenuously to remove the plinths, which are anathema to a shared future and shared space, from his constituency. I hope that that problem can be resolved.

Mr McDevitt: I applaud the Minister's commitment to a shared future. It is an important commitment, and it is regrettable that others do not share it. Specifically, what is the Minister's assessment of the progress that has been achieved on the Victoria Square regeneration project?

The Minister for Social Development: The £400 million Victoria Square development has been a resounding success in providing a shared space for all citizens and sections of the community to share and enjoy. It is a dynamic space that provides living, employment and leisure opportunities for people from Belfast, across the North of Ireland and, indeed, across the island of Ireland. Victoria Square has regenerated a large area of Belfast city centre and provided an iconic building that attracts local, national and international interest. I regard that urban regeneration project as a success, socially and commercially.

Shared spaces are only part of the work of a shared future. The progression of a shared future for all must be at the forefront of all our agendas. If we fail to build an inclusive future, we will jeopardise the opportunity that we have to secure lasting peace, sustainable communities and economic prosperity for all our people. I believe strongly that we need a strategic approach to the issue across government, across the Assembly and across civic society as an immediate priority.

Small Pockets of Deprivation Programme

2. **Mr Beggs** asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on future funding for the small pockets of deprivation programme. (AQO 1078/10)

The Minister for Social Development: In December 2009, I approved a further extension to the small pockets of deprivation (SPOD) programme. I committed £415,000 in this financial year for the schemes that are receiving support already from the SPOD programme. That involves supporting the running costs for community centres and salaries for staff who are employed using programme funds to deliver services at a local level. SPODs have been approved in 17 housing estates across Northern Ireland, including in Larne, Sunnylands in Carrickfergus and Greenisland, all of which are in the Member's constituency of East Antrim.

Mr Beggs: Will the Minister acknowledge that the small pockets of deprivation programme was introduced as a result of the adverse findings of the equality impact assessment carried out in the community regeneration programme? Will she ensure that continuing support is given to the programme? She said that the programme provides salaries. Many of those small communities do not even have —

Mr Speaker: The Member must come to a question.

Mr Beggs: They do not even have full-time workers, so will she ensure that funds will be made available to assist the communities in Larne, Carrickfergus and Newtownabbey?

The Minister for Social Development: The SPOD programme is an extension of the neighbourhood renewal programme. It was established to deal with certain pockets of

deprivation that were outside the 10% of the most disadvantaged areas in Northern Ireland that were eligible for neighbourhood renewal funding. The SPOD programme is a further means of assistance.

Two groups in the East Antrim constituency are eligible to apply for SPOD funding: the Carrickfergus Community Forum and Bawnmore and District Residents' Association. The Housing Executive, on behalf of DSD, has met representatives of the Carrickfergus group, which, I understand, could have submitted its application by now. The group is likely to be awarded salary and running costs. A meeting took place with the Bawnmore group on 15 March 2010, and it is being assisted with the preparation of an application for running costs only.

Community groups in receipt of SPOD funding in the Larne area make their applications through Larne Borough Council, and, on receipt of formal applications, decisions are taken on the funding to be awarded to each group. The Member will be aware that the urban regeneration side of our programme is restricted, owing to the budgetary constraints under which we operate. However, I will take on board what the Member said and look at the SPOD programme to see how it may be of further benefit to his area.

Mr Hamilton: I know from the good work that is done in SPOD areas in my constituency, such as the Glen and West Winds estates in Newtownards, that, welcome as the extension of funding for this year is to the people working in those estates, it is the certainty not the quantum of funding that is more important. Does the Minister agree that extending programmes year on year is less favourable than having more certainty around a programme's continuance for two, three, four or more years?

The Minister for Social Development: I will deal with Mr Hamilton's point and then discuss Newtownards. I am sure that the Member agrees with me that it would be great if I had certainty when it comes to the budget for all aspects of my programme. No doubt he will be happy to lobby his colleague the Minister of Finance and Personnel to ensure certainty around the budget for urban regeneration as well as those for housing and the community and voluntary sector. That is an important political point. I must be given certainty that the programme for tackling disadvantage

and deprivation will continue. After all, my Department is responsible for tackling deprivation and protecting the vulnerable.

The Member will recall that we, along with Mr Shannon, visited the various areas that he wants to see designated SPOD areas. At his request, I had an opportunity to meet some of the groups that are doing extremely good work on behalf of civic society to bring people together and tackle deprivation.

Three areas in Newtownards receive support from the SPOD programme. Applications have been received from the Glen, West Winds and Bowtown estates. Those applications have been assessed, and letters of offer have been issued to meet the amounts claimed to cover their running costs and salaries, which is approximately £73,000 for this financial year.

Mr Speaker: I remind Members that, if they wish to ask a supplementary question, they must continually rise in their place. I have to repeat that request almost every Monday and Tuesday during Question Time.

Mrs M Bradley: Sorry about that, Mr Speaker.

Will the Minister summarise how the 2009-2010 budget for neighbourhood renewal has been expended?

The Minister for Social Development: In 2007, I was able to secure £60 million of revenue funding for the neighbourhood renewal investment fund for 2008-09 to 2010-11. In each year during the current comprehensive spending review period, including 2009-2010, £20 million has been allocated to neighbourhood renewal areas. The funds are allocated per capita across the 36 neighbourhood renewal areas to help address the needs of 280,000 people in 100,000 households in the most deprived areas of Northern Ireland.

In 2009-2010, £20 million was allocated to support more than 300 projects designed to address the underlying causes of poverty and disadvantage. The projects delivered services that were designed to address identified needs for employment and training, education and skills, health, and crime prevention and community safety. They also helped to improve the local environment and to develop communities' confidence and capacity to contribute to improving the quality of life in their

area. The services supported were identified as priorities in neighbourhood renewal action plans, which communities drew up in partnership with local government and statutory agencies. The most important point is that that was done in consultation with local residents.

3.15 pm

Public Realm Projects

3. Mr W Clarke asked the Minister for Social Development what budget is available to her to complete public realm commitments. (AQO 1079/10)

The Minister for Social Development: In 2009-2010, my Department spent over £22 million on public realm projects. That included £11.4 million on schemes in Belfast, £5.9 million on the Waterloo Place scheme in Derry and £4.8 million on various schemes in the regional towns of Armagh, Lurgan and Portadown. A budget allocation of £18.3 million is required for 2010-11 to complete existing projects, and the availability of that budget will depend on the reallocation of urban regeneration funds earmarked for the Royal Exchange project, which has slipped back. At the time of the previous comprehensive spending review, the urban regeneration capital budget was fully allocated to the Royal Exchange project to cover an anticipated £110 million debtor position. As the Royal Exchange project has now slipped into future years, the intention is to place bids in the June in-year monitoring round to reinstate the funding that is required for other key regeneration projects, including public realm commitments.

Mr W Clarke: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her response. It is widely recognised that public realm schemes enhance business opportunities, particularly for small businesses. However, there can be a negative impact on small businesses during the construction phase of such schemes. In Kilkeel, in the Minister's constituency of South Down, I have had complaints about businesses losing up to 80% of their business. Will the Minister assure the House that everything will be done to minimise the impact on small businesses during the construction phase of public realm schemes?

The Minister for Social Development: I will deal with that question in two parts. I have been

addressing the issue in Kilkeel, and yesterday, at my request, my officials attended a meeting at Newry and Mourne District Council. At my insistence and instruction, my officials will meet the retailers from Newry Street, Kilkeel. However, the current work in that area is being carried out by Northern Ireland Water, an agency that is managed and administered by the Member's colleague Minister Murphy.

Mr Clarke is based in Newcastle, at the foot of the Mourne, which is a beautiful town in which our public realm schemes have gained many fine prizes. I am sure that he would agree that that is a fine example of what DSD can do in local communities. On many occasions, on personal and business visits, I have noticed that Newcastle is booming, with a large range of local restaurants and shops all doing very good business.

Mr Kinahan: Will the Minister update me on the current proposals for the regeneration of Antrim town, particularly in the Church Street area? Can she tell me whether there is any news on proposals for Crumlin?

Mr Kennedy: Reg Empey will look after that.

The Minister for Social Development: Mr Kennedy is enjoying himself today and is in rather jovial spirits.

The regeneration scheme for Antrim town has been worked up over the last three years and, since becoming Minister, I have visited the town on about three occasions to look at the regeneration possibilities. A consultation is about to commence on the scheme for environmental improvements, which are technically called public realm schemes. There is an opportunity to lever in council funding of around £75,000 to £100,000. DRD will also be contributing. However, there is a risk that the other funding could be lost if there is inadequate progress in this financial year. I am sure that Mr Kinahan, wearing his local councillor's hat, will be doing everything to secure that funding.

I will investigate the situation in Crumlin. However, from memory, I think that its population level is below the 4,500 threshold for being treated by DSD. I will write to the Member on Crumlin.

Mr A Maginness: I thank the Minister for her characteristically illuminating and informative

answers to the House. What are the Minister's priorities for urban regeneration in the year ahead?

The Minister for Social Development: I want to complete the important regeneration work all over Belfast and the ongoing work in Derry, through Ilex, particularly on the new peace bridge. My priorities also include making progress on a range of regeneration projects, master plans and public realm improvements in Belfast city centre and town centres across the North. Those include Waterloo Place, working with Derry City Council, Streets Ahead in Belfast and the Andersonstown Road in Belfast. Public realm works are ongoing in Portadown, Kilkeel, Downpatrick, Dungannon and other regional towns. Investment in all those projects amounts to a grand total of £19.3 million of contractual commitments. That represents a major contribution to the local economy and to keeping people in jobs, which is the very issue that exercises people throughout Northern Ireland.

Mr Speaker: Question 4 has been withdrawn, and the Member is not in his place to ask question 5.

Town Centre Regeneration

6. **Mr P J Bradley** asked the Minister for Social Development to outline progress in relation to the regeneration and environmental improvement work currently being carried out by her Department in town centres. (AQO 1082/10)

The Minister for Social Development: In the past year, despite the difficult economic climate and increasing pressures on public budgets, my Department has made significant progress in its efforts to regenerate town centres. Since the start of 2009, my Department has published town centre master plans for Omagh, Ballymena, Ballycastle and Armagh. Master plans for a further 16 towns are in progress and will be published before the end of 2010. My Department has been highly successful in delivering public realm and environmental improvement schemes in town centres. Over the past year, 10 such projects have been completed, including the major award-winning schemes in Newcastle and Armagh and smaller projects in towns such as Warrenpoint, Cookstown, Ballymoney, Antrim and Randalstown. Also, despite the downturn in the property and construction sectors, we have

made progress on forming partnerships with the private sector to redevelop derelict sites in Bangor, Holywood and Portadown.

Mr P J Bradley: My supplementary question is one that Mr Clarke could, perhaps, have asked. Will the Minister detail the regeneration work that is ongoing in or planned for South Down?

The Minister for Social Development: I thank the Member for asking such a positive question. I am pleased to inform him that we are doing a great deal of work in South Down, including in Newry, part of which is located in South Down. In 2007, my Department purchased the site of the former North Street flats, which is close to the centre of Newry, and we aim to bring forward a development there that will benefit the city. Work to prepare concept designs for proposed public realm improvements at Hill Street and Monaghan Street in the city centre is nearing completion. In the past few weeks, we engaged the Paul Hogarth Company, a firm of specialist planning consultants, to prepare a master plan for Newry city centre. In Warrenpoint town centre, we completed a public realm scheme in Queen Street at a cost of £500,000.

Later this year, work will start on regeneration strategies for the south Down coastal towns of Warrenpoint, Kilkeel and Newcastle. Those strategies will help to guide the Department on what further regeneration work is required in those towns. We have committed £1.3 million to the cost of a significant environmental improvement scheme in the centre of Kilkeel, which will cost a total of just under £1.45 million. That scheme has been designed to make the town centre a neutral environment with open space that is, importantly, welcoming to all. A contractor has been appointed, and work is starting. In the past year, we completed a major public realm scheme along Main Street in Newcastle. That scheme, which complements the work undertaken by Down District Council on the seafront, has won awards for its high-quality design and excellent environmental standards.

We have also committed £2.6 million to a significant environmental improvement scheme in the centre of Downpatrick, the total cost of which will be just over £2.95 million. The scheme has been designed to enhance the reputation of Downpatrick as an attractive visitor destination that is closely allied with St Patrick as the place where he began and ended his ministry. The scheme will also ensure that

Downpatrick becomes not only an attractive visitor destination but a place that is welcoming to the local community and visitors alike. A contractor has been appointed, and work will start in the town centre very shortly. I anticipate that the scheme will be completed during 2011. Public consultation on the Downpatrick master plan ended on 19 March 2010, and I anticipate that the final master plan will be published by the start of the summer. We are doing a lot, but we have much still to do.

Mr G Robinson: Is there a regeneration scheme planned for the centre of Limavady?

The Minister for Social Development: I take the Member's question on board. On various occasions, he and my colleague Mr Dallat have invited me to visit Limavady. I have found it to be a thriving local economy. I will look at the area and come back to the Member and to Mr Dallat, who has also raised the issue with me.

I am sure that the Member will also lobby his colleague the Minister of Finance and Personnel to ensure that I receive additional funds to promote and pump-prime not only the public realm but urban regeneration in towns and cities in Northern Ireland.

Mr Cree: It was good to hear the Minister mention every town in Northern Ireland before she mentioned north Down, but she got there in the end. Will she provide an update on the progress made with urban regeneration in Bangor?

The Minister for Social Development: The Member will recall that I visited Bangor just before Christmas to deal with the master plan for the area and with the development at Queen's Parade, which has the support of North Down Borough Council. That is a tremendous opportunity to transform that area and ensure that Bangor will be able to compete as a tourist destination with the other coastal towns in County Down.

A master plan is being prepared for Bangor, and I will write to the Member and tell him what stage it has reached. The development of the master plan will be an opportunity for all Assembly Members and councillors for the north Down area to define the development opportunities for their town for the next 20 to 25 years. Therefore, I ask them to seize that opportunity.

Social Housing: Mid Ulster

7. **Mrs O'Neill** asked the Minister for Social Development how many units of social housing were completed in the Mid Ulster constituency in each of the last three years. (AQO 1083/10)

The Minister for Social Development: I am pleased to report that, despite the very well documented problems with my budget, we have just started building 1,838 houses, which is the largest number of new homes for over a decade. Those homes have been delivered to people in housing need across the North of Ireland.

The Member understandably has a specific interest in Mid Ulster. I am happy to say that in the three years up to March this year we delivered 69 new homes at a cost of £5.7 million. We have plans for more homes in the area, which is something that my colleague Mr McGlone has been constantly asking me about. We have schemes planned for 2010-11, covering Cookstown and Magherafelt, and for 2011-12, covering Coalisland, Knockcloghrim, Moneymore, Draperstown and Cookstown. That is significant work.

Of course, our social housing development programme is just one way that we meet housing need in any given location or constituency. The reletting of existing homes in the public sector is another way in which we can help to put more people into houses. We also know that more people are turning to the private rented sector to address their housing needs, and our new strategy, 'Building Solid Foundations', will offer some help and support to those who choose the private rented sector as their tenure of choice.

3.30 pm

Mr P Maskey: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. When P J Bradley asked question 6 about improvement work in town centres, it was clear that the Minister read out a scripted speech about her own constituency that did not even relate to the question. Given purdah and the upcoming election on 6 May, it is very clear that the Minister used the opportunity for electioneering purposes. That is out of order. Will you make a ruling on that? *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. P J Bradley asked a very detailed question that the Minister responded to. All parties are normally allowed to ask supplementary questions, and I am sure

that Members to my left could have asked a supplementary question to the Minister for Social Development. That did not happen. Moreover, I am conscious that minds are somewhere else, maybe not in the Chamber, and that Ministers may take the opportunity to say something. As far as I am concerned, P J Bradley asked a detailed question and the Minister felt that she needed to give a detailed answer. As you know, the Committee on Procedures has looked at the issue of Ministers giving long-winded answers to questions, and, come September, Ministers will have two minutes to answer the original question and one minute to answer a supplementary question.

Executive Committee Business

Revised Programme of Expenditure 2010-11

Debate resumed on motion:

That this Assembly approves the revised programme of expenditure proposals for 2010-11 as set out in the Budget laid before the Assembly on 13 April 2010. — [The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr S Wilson).]

The Minister of Finance and Personnel

(Mr S Wilson): I assure the House that I will not make any announcements about East Antrim during my winding-up speech on the Budget motion. I thank Members for the instructive debate, in which opposing views have been put forward. It is important that the Budget is dedicated to making Northern Ireland a better place for our people. Many of the issues have been aired during previous discussions, and, to a certain extent, the debate has covered old ground.

One recurrent theme was raised by the Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel and by a number of other Members including Mr Hamilton, Mr Storey, Mr Wells and Mr Kennedy. They said that the Budget debate has been curtailed by the absence of detailed information from a number of Departments to Committees, which, rightly, wanted to see how Ministers wished to implement any changes to the budgets in their Departments. I sought, as early as 7 January and on a number of occasions since, to encourage Ministers to provide the information that Committees need to scrutinise Ministers' decisions because, at the end of the day, although we agree the global sums in the Budget, it is up to Ministers to implement it in their Departments and to give the details to Committees.

In light of that, the Chairperson of the Finance Committee raised the issue of the process for future Budgets and the review of the Budget process. I regret that that has not happened more quickly, but other urgent work needed to be done. The Assembly would have agreed that the urgent work to revise this year's Budget was much more important than finalising the report on the Budget process. That has been completed only recently, but it will be sent to the Committee immediately, or shortly after, today's debate.

I hope that the new process will lead to earlier engagement by all Departments with Committees and the wider public, so that there will be an opportunity for Committees, at least, to give greater emphasis to realistic alternatives to the approach being proposed by the Executive.

Mr Hamilton talked about the social development budget and the fact that there was a lack of information. However, the budget allocated to the Department for Social Development will mean that £160 million will be available, which will provide for 2,000 new starts in 2010-11. That will be welcomed by the construction industry and those on housing waiting lists. It represents a 4.7% increase on the 2009-2010 position, and despite some complaints made in the past, this Assembly's record on building social houses has been exemplary. On top of that, there is £15 million extra available for people on low incomes to —

Mr F McCann: I agree with the Minister that the Executive have provided large amounts of money throughout this term to build social housing. However, there is another side to the story, and it involves maintenance and replacements. Funding moved from that side has a dire impact on the construction industry.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: A balance has to be struck between maintaining the current stock and building new houses. The current Minister's emphasis seems to be on building new houses. The target in the new social house building programme this year was exceeded. Had it been stuck to, perhaps there may well have been some more money for maintenance.

Mr McNarry is a great one for coming in here, making a speech, walking out again, and never bothering to return. That is why he continually makes mistakes. He is never here to learn. He asks questions, looks puzzled and says that he wants serious questions answered; but he never gets to hear the answers. So, he asks the same wrong questions next time. He seemed to have some great concern about the budgetary process, that urgent procedures were used, and he questioned whether the Budget was legal.

The process by which the Budget was decided by the Executive is legal: that is the first thing to say, and it is not waffle. Mr McNarry also accused me of waffle in other things. Let us get to the facts of the case. First, the draft

Budget and changes required were brought to the Executive in September 2009, which left plenty of time for consideration. The proposals were debated by the Assembly and were agreed unanimously. The changes to the draft Budget were taken to Ministers on 19 March 2010, for discussion at the Executive on 25 March 2010. There was no disagreement. The Health Minister raised a point about swine flu, but Mr McNarry's party put in a nil return to the proposals.

At one point, there was an issue about water, which meant that the Budget had to come back, but that was resolved. I think that the Assembly would have criticised me had we started the year without giving Ministers some certainty about the budgetary position. For that reason, and because there had been discussions in the Assembly, that Ministers had been presented with the final proposals, the fact that there were nil returns on those final proposals, and that there was only a small area of disagreement that was quickly resolved, I think that it was fairly safe to go down the route of accelerated passage. We would have been criticised for entering the year without the Budget agreed.

Mr Farry asked a question about the Budget. The changes to the Budget were insignificant. The changes made between what the Assembly and Executive Ministers knew from the beginning of January and what was finally presented were minimal.

Instead of deferring full consideration of the Northern Ireland Water bid until the June monitoring round as normal, that was done and the relevant figure changed. Therefore, we will not consider that in June; it has been done now. When the Assembly discussed the invest to save proposals in February, £26 million had not been allocated, but now it has, so there is £26 million of a change across the budgets as a result of those allocations being made. There were also some technical changes, but those are all the changes that were made. Therefore, by and large, there has been a discussion and an agreement on this Budget.

Mr O'Loan started his speech by saying that he could not agree the revised programme of expenditure proposals and would probably be dividing the House. I have made the point that he did not divide the House on this in February. There is no significant change in the Budget, and I suspect that the only difference between now and February is that there is an election in

a couple of weeks' time. So, Mr McNarry, sorry, Mr O'Loan, being ever the opportunist — of course, Mr McNarry is an opportunist as well — has decided that he will divide the House on a Budget that is basically the same as one about which he had no concerns, or not enough to divide the House, a month and a half ago. He has the right to do that if he wants to, but he must explain that inconsistency.

Mr O'Loan also raised the issue —

Mr O'Loan: Will the Minister give way?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I will. Since I mentioned the Member, I should give way.

Mr O'Loan: I presume that the Minister accepts that there is some significance to this substantial document 'Revised 2010-11 Spending Plans for NI Departments'. It is that document and the related proposal that have come to the Assembly today for the first time. At this formal stage, it is entirely appropriate for my party to take a view, and our view is that we do not accept it because of the significant cuts in previously determined spending lines.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I do not want to labour the point, but most of the figures — in fact, 99.9% of the figures in the final version of the document to which he referred — have been available and have been discussed in the Assembly and by Committees over the past two and a half months. The only changes are those that I listed in response to Mr Farry's question, namely the change in the Department for Regional Development and the allocation of the invest to save funding. I would have thought that, if there were fundamental difficulties, we would have had a Division before now. However, as I said, it is the Member's right and if he wishes to call a Division, that is fine, but people will see it for what it is: a cheap way to distance himself from the kind of decisions that must be made.

Mr O'Loan also asked what preparations had been made in respect of the slowdown in spending for 2011-12. First, we do not fully know what the situation will be; we are feeling our way in the dark, and the 2010 UK Budget did not really give us much of an indication. However, we know that current spending is not likely to go up at all and that there may well be a reduction of up to 10% in capital spending. I have already told Departments that they should prepare for that; it should not come as a shock to them and they should be looking now at

their spending plans in light of the available information. The invest to save programme was designed to help Departments deal with some of those concerns.

I think that I have dealt with Mr O'Loan's concerns about the Budget. His concerns do not seem to be shared by his party leader, who offered no comment on the recommendations before us. Perhaps the Member needs to talk to her, and a wee bit more communication in the SDLP might be helpful.

I have dealt with Mr Farry's point about how the figures changed. I hope that he is clear on that. As always, he raised the issue of the cost of division. I have answered that question before. Of course, he can now ask his own Minister, because one of the areas in which the cost of division is most apparent will be under the responsibility of the Department of Justice. It will be interesting to see what his party does now.

My one hope, though, is that Mr Farry will not become an Establishment figure. I have always enjoyed the debates and his independence. He is, perhaps, my kindred spirit on this type of topic. He is always prepared to raise his head above the parapet. I hope that he is not now firmly pulled below the parapet because his party is part of the Establishment. I hope that he will continue to have that independence, which at least leads to some lively debate in the Assembly.

3.45 pm

He also raised the issue of corporation tax. He unfairly accused me of doing a 360 degree turn on corporation tax. He accused me of doing twice as much as Mr McNarry did: he accused me of doing a 180 degree turn. Now Mr Farry has me turning round in circles on the issue. The position that I adopted has been consistent. If the result of a reduction in corporation tax is that the block grant is hit immediately, which is bound to have an impact on spending in Northern Ireland and on the move towards a recovery, it is not a price worth paying. That is not inconsistent with my party's position. We said that if we had leverage, we would seek to negotiate the advantage that a reduction in corporation tax would bring without the cost being attached. That may or may not be achievable, but it is entirely consistent with the reservations that I raised in that regard.

Mr Boylan raised the question of redundancies in non-governmental organisations. I have always said that it is far better to be honest: in a period of constrained expenditure, and given the amount of expenditure that goes on manpower and employment in Departments and organisations that rely on public spending, we cannot avoid job losses. They are inevitable.

I see that my time is nearly up. I thank Members for the part that they played in the debate today. Although we have spending plans before us, funding has been tight. I hope that the Assembly will endorse the Budget.

Mr Speaker: Before I put the Question, I remind Members that the motion requires cross-community support.

Question put.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 41; Noes 21.

AYES

Nationalist:

Mr Brady, Mr Leonard, Mr P Maskey, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McElduff, Mrs McGill, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McHugh, Mr McLaughlin, Mr Molloy, Mr Murphy, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Ms S Ramsey.

Unionist:

Mr Bell, Mr Bresland, Lord Browne, Mr T Clarke, Mr Easton, Mrs Foster, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Irwin, Mr McCausland, Miss McIlveen, Lord Morrow, Mr Newton, Mr G Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Shannon, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr S Wilson.

Other:

Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Ms Lo, Mr McCarthy.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr F McCann and Mr G Robinson.

NOES

Nationalist:

Mr Attwood, Mrs M Bradley, Mr P J Bradley, Mr Gallagher, Mrs D Kelly, Mr A Maginness, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Mr McGlone, Mr O'Loan, Mr P Ramsey.

Unionist:

Mr Cobain, Rev Dr Robert Coulter, Mr Elliott, Mr Gardiner, Mr Kinahan, Mr McCallister, Mr McClarty, Mr B McCrea, Mr K Robinson, Mr Savage.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr A Maginness and Mr McDevitt.

Total votes	62	Total Ayes	41	[66.1%]
Nationalist Votes	27	Nationalist Ayes	16	[59.3%]
Unionist Votes	31	Unionist Ayes	21	[67.7%]
Other Votes	4	Other Ayes	4	[100.0%]

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

That this Assembly approves the revised programme of expenditure proposals for 2010-11 as set out in the Budget laid before the Assembly on 13 April 2010.

Committee Business

Get on Board Programme

Mr Speaker: The next item of business is the Committee for Employment and Learning motion on the Get on Board programme. The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour 30 minutes for the debate. The proposer of the motion will have 10 minutes in which to propose and 10 minutes in which to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who are called to speak will have five minutes. I ask Members who are leaving the Chamber to do so in an orderly fashion.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning (Mrs D Kelly): I beg to move

That this Assembly commends the Minister for Employment and Learning for providing funding for the Get on Board programme, which aims to increase and diversify participation in and access to public appointments; calls on the Minister to ask all Departments with responsibility for the delivery of the public appointments process to nominate a specific contact to engage with the programme's delivery; and further calls on the Minister to request that his Executive colleagues arrange with their non-departmental public bodies and agencies for programme participants to be able to attend meetings to gain a greater insight into their workings.

I am pleased to speak as Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning and to bring this important motion to the Floor.

4.00 pm

I want to pay tribute to the previous Committee Chairperson, Ms Sue Ramsey, who ensured that the motion was tabled. Members understand that the issue of public appointments is one that does not sit within a single departmental remit but goes to the heart of two issues that every Member should care passionately about: social inclusion and widening participation. Both of those principles are key parts of the current Programme for Government, and the Committee uses them as touchstones for many of the issues that it deals with. I want Members to think about those issues in their Committees and how they apply to their stakeholder groups. The Employment and Learning Committee's purposes today are to highlight the issue of opening up public appointments so that they

better reflect the diversity of our community, and to call for action.

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

I understand that the Minister for Employment and Learning will be responding today, and I hope that he will be able to attend as scheduled. I reassure the Minister that the Committee clearly understands that the issue of public appointments falls primarily to the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister. However, the Minister for Employment and Learning has provided resources for the development and roll-out of the Get on Board programme, for which he is to be commended. The Committee's stakeholders urged it to bring this issue to the Chamber.

The Committee seeks the Minister's assistance as an advocate within the Executive for the Get on Board programme. It wants him to encourage his Executive colleagues and their Departments, agencies and bodies to engage with the programme and improve access for everyone to public appointments.

The Get on Board programme was developed by the Department for Employment and Learning and Belfast Metropolitan College in response to criticisms of, and recommendations regarding, the public appointments process made by Baroness Fritchie, the Commissioner for Public Appointments at the time. She recommended the development of a short course designed to help people learn the skills needed for public appointments. The ultimate aim of the Get on Board course is to widen participation in public bodies. The current commissioner, Felicity Houston, is a strong advocate of the merits of the programme. The programme was piloted in March 2006 by Belfast Metropolitan College, which has continued to run it in subsequent years. The course was mentioned in the OFMDFM public appointments annual report for 2008-09 as being:

"developed to help improve public accessibility to public appointments and other public life positions by explaining what board members actually do and how the appointments process works".

The same annual report went on to highlight the statistics regarding public appointments with which we are all familiar: too few women, younger people, people with disabilities and people from ethnic and other minority groups.

That means, in effect, that there are too many white, middle aged, middle class men.

The Get on Board programme seeks to deal with key barriers to the public appointments system as identified in a 2005 report from the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments here. Those barriers are: a lack of awareness of public appointments; the unattractiveness of public appointments; a lack of confidence to apply for public appointments; the commitment associated with public appointments; and remuneration. Recommendation 6 of the report was:

“departments explore ways to make it easier for potential applicants to understand and meet the commitments associated with a public appointment.”

That is what the Get on Board programme is all about. A DEL evaluation of the programme in June 2008 indicated that it had a number of positive achievements, including: the attraction of people hitherto not engaged in public bodies; the possible increased participation of women; high completion and qualification attainment rates; high satisfaction with the course; and evidence of post-course progression. There was a suggestion in the report that further work needed to be done to engage some excluded groups in the programme, such as the unemployed, the poorly-qualified and people in lower-status jobs. The Committee believes that efforts can be made with stakeholder groups to increase participation in the course and the public appointments process by those groups.

As I said, the Committee commends the Minister for providing funding for the development, running and further roll-out of the Get on Board programme. That important course focuses on preparing people for the daunting application process for public appointments and gives participants a clear insight into the nature and function of those offices. The Committee is keen to ensure that all its stakeholders have access to those roles, and other Members will want the same for their Committee stakeholder groups.

The Committee advocates that other Committees engage with their stakeholders as we have and encourage them to seek public appointments. The Get on Board programme provides an ideal vehicle for the achievement of that aim. We want greater diversity among those who make up public bodies and who influence

public policy; we want to give a voice to those who are seldom heard.

Cost is a particular problem for the Committee's stakeholders in accessing the Get on Board programme: the tuition fee for the programme is £140. As the course is accredited, there is an exam, for which the fee is £24, making a total of £164. The Scottish Government offer a one-day, public appointments, non-accredited workshop that is free of charge, and the Welsh Government offer a similar two-day course. The Committee recognises that Get on Board is much longer and is accredited, but surely there is scope to offer that course free of charge to users, considering its potential impact on social inclusion and widening participation in society.

Some of the Committee's stakeholder groups said that it would be useful to have the course available to them locally. The Committee is aware that the South West College, the South Eastern Regional College and the North West Regional College have worked with Belfast Metropolitan College (BMC) to look at providing the course collaboratively. Advertisements for the course were run in local papers to ascertain where the greatest demand for it was, as that would determine which college campuses would offer it. However, at present, the Committee does not know which, if any, colleges will actually run the course. It is still being advertised on the BMC website; however, the Committee understands that no one is available to run the course at that college.

The situation is such that the Committee believes that it is time for the Minister and his Executive colleagues to step in, put the course on a firm footing, roll it out geographically, and actively promote it through Members and Committees engaging with their stakeholders and through targeted advertising. Departments and their agencies and bodies must engage with the course, and boards must be accessible to those who wish to sit on them.

The Committee asks the Minister to make the Get on Board programme known to his Executive colleagues, and it suggests that he ask them to get their officials to engage with the Commissioner for Public Appointments so that they might have a clear understanding of the deficiencies of the public appointments process and the requirements for making the process and its outcomes more inclusive and more representative of all groups. I ask all Members

present to engage with Ministers through their Committees and to ask them how they intend to address the under-representation of the groups listed earlier.

Ms S Ramsey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the opportunity to speak on the motion, and I commend the Committee for Employment and Learning for having the foresight to bring it to the Assembly. I also want to thank the Chairperson for her kind words, and, if I can be of any assistance to her in her new role, she should feel free to call on me. We already have a good working relationship in the Committee, and I hope that that will continue.

The motion came about after I met Eileen Mullan from Belfast Metropolitan College. She expressed her concerns about participation levels for a course on public appointments and whether people were getting the necessary training for, and advice on how to get involved in, public appointments. I felt that it was an issue that Committee members were aware of, had concerns about and would be interested in, so I asked Ms Mullan to bring the matter to the Committee.

During that presentation, we were struck by the evidence of a senior member of the community who had been a firefighter in his time and had decided to give something back by taking on a public role but who had been turned down. Statistics show that most of those who hold public appointments are middle-aged male professionals. It was a concern to us that that firefighter was a professional, but he still found the application process hard to get through.

When we talk about public appointment holders being mainly male and middle aged, one of my colleagues describes them as, "male, pale and stale." I happen to agree with her. That is no reflection on anyone who holds a public appointment, but we need to change that image and the statistics behind it.

This Assembly is about change; the Executive are about change; and we, as elected activists, get involved in political life to bring about change to our communities and constituencies.

As the Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning said, the issue of public appointments does not rest with the Department for Employment and Learning but with all Departments. I commend the

Minister for Employment and Learning and his Department for taking the initiative and funding the programme. When we have the opportunity to commend, it is important that we do so. The purpose of the motion is to ask the Minister to take it one step further and go to his Executive colleagues about the issue.

One of the key points of the Programme for Government that the Chairperson spoke about was social inclusion. If we want to bring about change for the better, we need to ensure that all Departments take ownership of public appointments. As I said, social inclusion is a key aspect of the Programme for Government.

The Get on Board programme came about following recommendations and a call for the development of a short course. Although I welcome that, I have a genuine concern, because when talking about getting more women, people with disabilities and young people involved, it must be recognised that the cost of the course will be a factor. Although we are taking the step to give people the tools to get involved in public appointments, the cost is still a barrier to some. It is an added cost that particularly affects young people, lone parents and women who are in low-paid employment.

A Public Accounts Committee report on the hospitality industry from the 2007-08 session called on OFMDFM to bring forward proposals to change how public appointments are made. I want the Minister to tell us whether that has happened, because in October 2007, the then junior Minister Paisley, while commending the Get on Board programme, said:

"it's important that individuals from a wide range of backgrounds take up public appointments".

That statement was made by a junior Minister in OFMDFM; therefore, we need to be aware that that Department is also playing its part.

Statistics show that a lot of people from certain groups are still under-represented in public appointments. Although we are providing resources to try to change those statistics, we must ensure that we are changing them for the better.

I am conscious that I am running out of time. I support the motion, part of which calls on the Minister for Employment and Learning to raise the issue with his Executive colleagues. Therefore, I ask that the Minister provides

regular updates about responses from his Executive colleagues or departmental officials.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Ms S Ramsey: It is important that we send out a clear message to our communities and constituents that, when they bring concerns to the Assembly, we are listening and making a difference to their lives.

Mr McClarty: I also welcome the debate and agree with the sentiments expressed in the motion.

The Get on Board programme is an excellent course that seeks to develop transferrable skills to individuals with a view to public appointments. Diversifying the profile of those being appointed to public bodies is a sound objective for the Executive. This programme is testament to the Minister's commitment to that goal.

The motion calls for agencies and bodies, which are likely to have Get on Board alumni appointed to them, to open up meetings and enable programme participants to attend. It is desirable that all such bodies should have as many meetings as possible open to the public as a matter of course. I agree that it would be useful for Get on Board participants to have the opportunity to attend meetings to get a feel for how business is done, for better or worse. I also feel that public scrutiny of non-departmental public bodies and agencies should be an objective in itself.

Although I support the sentiment of the motion, I feel that there are broader objectives that can be achieved through an open-door approach. However, I understand that that cannot be a universal approach.

I look forward to hearing the Minister's reply to the debate, and I am particularly interested in how his Department has been assisting in the development of the course. How the course is funded and assuring value for money for the taxpayer is obviously an imperative in any such matters.

4.15 pm

It must be said that, for Northern Ireland's economy to grow, we must grow the private sector. Therefore, I hope that the Minister's primary employment priorities are focused on reducing gradually the proportion of people in Northern Ireland who are employed by the

state. That said, I welcome the Get on Board programme for the work that it does in assisting a wider range of people to participate in the governance of our public bodies. I support the motion, and I congratulate the Minister on his Department's handling of the programme.

Ms Lo: I support the motion, although I have reservations about the Get on Board programme. No doubt the programme has been well attended, but I am not sure whether I would call it successful. Its main aim is to attract people who have been under-represented on public bodies, such as women, those with disabilities, ethnic minorities and those from all walks of life, not just retired head teachers and accountants. Early indications are that the majority of people who attend programme courses have degrees and higher-status jobs. Course representation is also higher among those aged 35 and over. Therefore, we are attracting more of the same; people who are already on public bodies.

I also have reservations about barriers to the course. If it continues to be run in its current format in further education colleges, it will not be suitable or appropriate for many people who come from under-represented groups or communities. First, the cost is too high; £146 is a lot of money. Secondly, the course is far too long. Including examinations, the accredited course lasts for 12 weeks, which is unattractive to working people from a community sector background. Someone mentioned the Scottish model, which consists of a one-day, non-accredited workshop that is free of charge. The Welsh Government offer something similar, which lasts two days and is also free of charge. That is much more appealing to the sort of people whom we want to attract to public bodies.

Furthermore, I am concerned that it is not enough to hold the courses in further education colleges. They should be run concurrently in community settings, such as women's centres, disability support organisations and ethnic minority support organisations, not in big institutions into which many local people do not want to go and which they find to be too formal. I would like the Minister to think about those points. The cause is good, and I support diversification and bringing people in to public bodies from all walks of life. However, we must make the process more accessible.

Mrs McGill: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. As a member of the Committee for Employment and Learning, I support the motion, and I commend the Minister for the work that has been done so far. Like other Members who have contributed to the debate, I encourage the Minister to make progress on the matter.

The subject of public appointments is a big issue, particularly for those who know little or nothing about the appointment process or about the power that public bodies have in many situations. Recently, I learned something about a particular public body. The body to which I refer is the Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside. The reason that I learned a little about that public body is because of an issue that arose with regard to the designation of an area of special scientific interest (ASSI) in the Gortin and Greencastle area of my constituency. That designation was particularly fraught for people in the area. Parts of local farmers' land were to be designated in a way with which they, perhaps, did not agree. We learned that the Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside could advise the Minister on the matter. When we asked to speak to the council, we met one member; I believe that the chairperson was unavailable. Although it was a local issue that affected people who lived in the area, they knew little about the council.

Members mentioned under-representation on certain public bodies. I have a list of the members of the council, which advises the Minister of the Environment. The list supports points that have already been made about under-representation. Of the council's 18 members, 15 are male and only three are female. The council deals with the countryside, and females also have a role and a contribution to make. Certainly, widening access and broadening participation is vital to that. If a course is designed to encourage people to get on board and learn about public appointments, that certainly helps communities and society in general.

Members referred to the fees of £164. The Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network wrote to Belfast Metropolitan College about that issue. It made the point well that women, particularly those in rural areas, are not represented at that level, and fees of £164 certainly increase barriers to their participation. The Public Accounts Committee said that action must be taken and access widened. That is

supported by earlier contributions in the debate and by evidence.

Another group that is clearly under-represented is people with disabilities. I looked at statistics for 2007-08 from OFMDFM's central appointments unit that relate to people with disabilities. The documentation gives the figure of 45 with regard to disability, after which it states that there are no statistics on appointments. I am not sure whether that means that 45 people with disabilities applied but were not, in the final analysis, appointed.

Therefore, there is work to be done. The debate will contribute to that. I support the motion.

Mr P Ramsey: I thank the Committee Chairperson for tabling the motion. I welcome the Minister's attendance at the debate.

I want to address two themes, the first of which relates to the Get on Board course. The second theme is the appointments system and how Executive Ministers could act to ensure that the system is promoted to generate wide public knowledge of appointments and how they operate so that successful applications come from a wider range of applicants.

Clearly, as all members saw in evidence to the Committee, public bodies do not reflect the make-up of the general population, particularly in respect of gender, disability, age and ethnicity. That gives rise to questions about equality, which we are all keen to promote. It also means that key skills and insights are likely to be unavailable to various boards throughout Northern Ireland.

We must always be mindful that people who are appointed to public boards take on a great deal of work and responsibility that is over and above any remuneration that they may receive for their role. They put themselves in positions in which they can be held accountable for decisions that they take. It is right that people should be given the necessary support from government to prepare for possible appointments and to carry out their duties.

We have seen the governance issues that arose with regard to one of DCAL's arm's-length bodies. I am not going to go into the details, but the names of the members of those boards were tarnished as a result of the inactivity of some members. I was a member of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure at that

time, and for months the Committee received various reports on the Events Company and the difficulties that had occurred. However, good, decent people were also on those boards, and their names were tarnished.

As we all know, the Get on Board course is a worthy exercise that is designed to ensure wider access to public appointments. Based on the limited information that we have and given the timescales and the numbers involved, I understand that participants on the Get on Board course were successful in being appointed to various boards, and that is important. It is a matter of concern that the Get on Board course has been dropped by Belfast Metropolitan College and has not been taken up by any of the other colleges at present. Perhaps the Minister could use his influence to address that.

The low uptake of the course is part of the reason why it was dropped. Clearly, more needs to be done to persuade people to undertake the course, which has been particularly successful in preparing people from under-represented groups and has allowed them to successfully apply for and obtain board positions. I urge the Minister to go back to the colleges to see whether barriers to access, in particular, can be reduced and to ensure that the courses are promoted so that there is a greater take-up and they can be rolled out successfully across Northern Ireland.

I now want to talk about the appointments system. Research suggests that there is a lack of public knowledge about public appointments and the appointments system. That situation could be changed through better communications, and all our Ministers and their Departments could make an important statement and communicate their policy and role in the matter.

There is also concern that the various boards across Departments and their organisations seem to have a range of different methods of managing the appointments process. The application process is deemed to be complex, with forms that use terminology that may not be understood by people outside the immediate organisations. That situation is preventing competent people from applying successfully, if at all, for board positions. There should be greater standardisation across the boards' application processes, and the application forms should use language that

is better understood outside the immediate organisations.

In addition to his ensuring the roll-out of the Get on Board courses, I ask the Minister, as all Members have asked, to bring to his Executive colleagues and their Departments four points: to ensure higher levels of public awareness of public appointments; to design greater consistency into the appointments processes across the Departments; to ensure the reform of the appointments process; and to take the necessary steps to ensure that there is a cross section of the community on the boards so that they are reflective of the community on the basis of equality.

The Minister for Employment and Learning

(Sir Reg Empey): I thank the Committee for proposing the motion. It is clear that there has been a positive response from the Committee and a number of Members. Initially, I want to address some of the points that have been made.

I clarify that my Department funds the course as it funds every other course, and the funded learning unit (FLU) is applicable to this course as it is applicable to other recognised courses in the college funding. The colleges determine how much they charge for those courses, not the Department. As one Member said, some colleges charge £146 and others charge £39, but those are matters for individual colleges to determine. We fund them on the same basis as every other course.

The other common dominator from virtually all Members was that I should draw the matter to the attention of my Executive colleagues. I have no problem in doing that. I will undertake to do that, and the Department will keep the Committee informed of the responses that we receive.

OFMDFM has policy lead with regard to public appointments generally. One possibility might be to offer courses to applicants on a full cost-recovery basis. That is a matter for that Department, but I will certainly write to the First Minister and the deputy First Minister conveying that sentiment.

The issue of the development of the course was raised during the debate. The Department, through a former permanent secretary, initiated that idea some years ago.

4.30 pm

Anna Lo referred to the Scottish and Welsh practice of offering one- and two-day courses. Although there is nothing wrong with that type of course, the point that Pat Ramsey made was important. Some of the bodies that people are appointed to are significant organisations that hand out very significant amounts of money, and a number of appointees got themselves into difficulties because they did not fully understand their fiduciary responsibilities as directors or board members. Given the wide variety of appointments on offer across the Province — from voluntary and community bodies right through to heavy duty public sector organisations through which very large sums of money are spent — it is essential that people have a solid grounding in and understanding of the financial and other responsibilities of those roles. Therefore, I do not believe that a one- or two-day course is sufficient to cover the whole remit and spectrum of public appointments. Such courses would be helpful but not adequate.

Ms Lo: I have served on several public bodies. After appointment, appointees are sent on training courses, which are generally only one or two days in length. Appointees are taught the values and principles of what it means to be on a body through those training courses, and they learn the remit and responsibilities of the body as they go along.

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

Part of the problem is that the responsibilities of those serving on boards have grown. Take, for example, the issue of staff appointments and the need to treat applicants fairly and equally. That is a huge issue and one that prevents many from applying for appointment to the boards of public bodies. Mr Ramsey also raised the difficulty of some appointees being challenged on their financial duties, and a number of appointees, including those who had come from local government, found difficulties in that area. It is a question of horses for courses; there is a very large spectrum in public appointments.

The Department is looking at the issue from the point of view of widening access. I will give a sense of where we are with it: 208 people have completed the course, of whom 39 — 18.75% — have been successful in achieving a public appointment. Females accounted for 70% of the participants, 20% were under 40 years old, and

69% came from outside the Belfast area. That is fine up to a point, but I accept, as Mrs McGill said, that there is more to be done.

My Department has set aside money for the promotion of the courses, but how that is used is a matter for the colleges. The budget is in place, and colleges can draw down that money to promote the courses in their prospectus. It is not essential that courses are conducted in the classroom or on college campuses. Colleges already run courses all over their respective areas, in community centres and other locations. When it receives applications, each college must make a judgement as to where it feels the location of the course is most appropriate. That decision could be for geographical or other reasons, but there is no impediment to the courses being delivered outside college campuses. Further education is already well versed in delivering courses in the community.

The programme is helping and can help, but it must be remembered that the burden on individuals who take on public appointments is growing; let us be clear about that. People are subject to judicial reviews. Applicants to boards of governors of schools and colleges are doing those jobs for no financial reward. It is voluntary work, even if they chair those boards. They have a huge responsibility and make a huge commitment of time.

We are looking at the issue from the perspective of widening access. The programme is a good thing in any event, and it is part of the tools that are effective in widening access. We do not have the mix of people that, ideally, we would like, but we are getting there. We have provided the tools to the colleges to promote the courses, and, in part, they are doing that. So far, the resources have not been used up. They are still available for colleges if they wish to promote the courses.

Although the programme is open to all colleges, the courses are spreading away from Belfast Metropolitan College. I understand that, so far, the course has been delivered in Enniskillen, Londonderry, Cookstown, Belfast and Ballyclare. All colleges are aware of and are committed to the programme, but they are at the mercy of people showing interest. I understand that some interest has been shown in the programme in the Belfast area. There has been interest in other areas, but it is not yet clear whether those

other areas will have sufficient volume to make the programme worthwhile.

It is important that a qualification emerges at the end because that will give credibility to the course. The course is not essential, nor should it be a barrier to applying for a post. I would not say for one moment that people should not be in a position to have training when they take up a post — I would encourage that. However, the course gives people a basic understanding of their responsibilities, and I certainly undertake to write to colleagues to encourage them, where it is appropriate, to attend meetings of various boards, subject to confidentiality issues and other such considerations that Members will understand. I will do that, and I will be happy to report back to Members.

The First Minister and deputy First Minister have responsibility for public appointments in this area, and I will draw the debate to their attention. As I said, I will be happy to approach them to find out whether they will consider helping people to pay for the courses. I stress that my Department is funding the colleges through our normal mechanisms. I do not believe that it would be appropriate to go further than that at this stage, but that does not mean that others cannot do so.

Each Department has a designated public appointments contact, and those officials might be best placed to engage with the Get on Board programme. I am trying to take on board what Members have said. Although each Minister is responsible for making public appointments to the boards that come under the responsibility of their Department, I am happy to support the Committee's call for Ministers to nominate a specific contact in each Department to engage with the Get on Board programme. I have no difficulty with that, and I certainly support it.

I welcome any initiative that aims to improve access to public appointments, and I accept that the current profile is not ideal. The statistics that I provided earlier show that a high percentage, around 80%, of the people who have completed the course are women. That is over 160 people, which is encouraging. A significant number of younger people have done the course, and both those facts challenge the general assumption about the profile of the people who sit on boards. I hope that Members feel that that is positive.

As I said, the success rate so far is almost 19%. Given that the course is comparatively fresh, people often do not succeed on their first attempt. However, I hope that the experience of doing the course will give people the necessary confidence to keep applying. If they do not get one appointment, they should not assume that they will not get another one. I believe that people having that course under their belt is a positive development.

I thank the Committee for tabling the debate. I am trying to be as positive as possible in my response. I undertake to keep the Committee and the House fully informed about the response of my Executive colleagues when I receive that.

The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning (Mr Weir): I thank the Members who contributed to the debate. I suspect that this is not a particularly sexy subject and that we will not see it on the front page of the 'News Letter', the 'Belfast Telegraph' or 'The Irish News' tomorrow. Nevertheless, widening access to public appointments is meaty and important, and that has been reflected in the mature way in which the debate has been conducted. As a newly appointed member of the Committee, I thank the Committee and the former Chairperson in particular for bringing this matter forward. Perhaps I should thank them for dropping me and the new Chairperson in it at such an early stage.

Widening access is important. This may be a mixed metaphor, but, if we can provide a ladder to get people up to a level playing field with those who are already benefiting from public appointments, that is worthy. I think that it was Pat Ramsey who said that none of this was in any way meant to denigrate those who have served faithfully on public bodies for many years. In fact, they have made an outstanding contribution. Widening access and increasing the pool of people who can join public bodies is good for society as a whole.

A number of Members, including the Chairperson, referred to the concern that appointees are mainly male, middle-aged and middle-class or, as Sue Ramsey said, "male, pale and stale". As a 41-year-old Caucasian who previously worked as a barrister, I must speak up for that oppressed minority. In all seriousness, we must realise that public appointments are for everyone. Even some of those who fall into the category of

male, middle-aged professionals have felt excluded from public appointments until now. I do not know whether the firefighter to whom Ms Ramsey referred falls into that category.

I wish to make an important point. Ms Ramsey was right about that individual. We often focus on groups and stakeholders in society. However, we must also remember that there are a large number of individuals in society too. At times, many of them feel intimidated about applying for public appointments because they believe that it is like the Magic Circle and that if they are not able to tick particular boxes there is no point in applying in the first place. As much as this programme is about enabling people to gain qualifications and giving them opportunities, it is also about breaking down barriers and perceptions and giving people the confidence to apply for public appointments. Therefore, it is important that the process is as inclusive as possible. Indeed, although there is a focus on underrepresented groups, individuals can make the best use of it. For many people, there is an invisible wall when it comes to public appointments. They get the forms, if persuaded to do so, and, after looking at them, they wonder about the point of completing them because they are not qualified. We must highlight that issue.

4.45 pm

The outgoing Committee Chairperson outlined the background to the issue and talked about the importance of the push that came from the PAC. Members including Sue Ramsey, Pat Ramsey and the Minister referred to the fact that, although the Committee for Employment and Learning tabled the motion, it is a multi-departmental issue. Therefore, it is important that everyone plays their part. It is about ensuring that we do not have too narrow a focus, and, by the same token, widening access to public appointments is vital. As a society, the more representative our public bodies are, the more representative our decision-making will be. This goes beyond DEL, which I appreciate has been taking the lead on this issue because of the input from the further education colleges. However, it is a message that should go across the Executive as a whole.

David McClarty spoke of the need for diversification, which everyone would welcome. He also highlighted the importance of funding and value for money. Although everyone will welcome the programme, we have to ensure that we get the optimum result for the money

that is put in, and the Minister highlighted some of the success that there has been.

Anna Lo said that there were reservations about the programme. I suppose that the perception is that many people in public appointments are drawn from among those with degrees or higher status jobs. Therefore, we have to make sure that the doors are seen to be open to everyone. As much as anything, it is about breaking down perceptions. She also highlighted the Scottish Government and Welsh Government models. Again, there is a balance to be struck. We have to ensure that whatever is put in place does not create additional barriers for people.

I was struck by something that the Minister said. If someone is looking for a public appointment, it will require a major commitment on their part. However, he said that, at the initial stage, those people may be put off by having to complete a lengthy course. If we are going to provide somebody with qualifications, those must be viewed as credible when people go forward for public appointments. There are weaknesses in a one-day or two-day course. There is a balance to be struck.

Ms Lo also raised the important issue of flexibility in respect of locations, and it has been highlighted that the FE colleges have a reasonably open mind on that. Claire McGill gave a very clear-cut example of how public appointments can be relevant to a local community. She highlighted the major problems of a lack of knowledge and information about public appointments. If someone believes that they cannot apply or they do not know how to apply, those barriers must be overcome. Pat Ramsey detailed the two key themes of the scheme itself and the wider issue of public appointments. He made some concrete suggestions and highlighted the fact that public knowledge lies at the heart of this issue.

In his summing up, the Minister indicated that there were some restrictions on the Department and that, in many ways, fee-setting is largely in the hands of the colleges. Belfast Metropolitan College has carried out some initial projects, and the Minister referred to places where the programme has been used in other parts of Northern Ireland. If we are to promote and create diversity in our society, there has to be geographical diversity so that the programme can be accessed in different parts of Northern Ireland. We must avoid being seen as Belfast-

centric, because such programmes must permeate Northern Ireland.

In conclusion, the Committee warmly welcomes the initiative and the good work that has been done. However, as the Minister said, there is clearly more to be done. We have to build on the programme to ensure that we get an accessible and financially viable scheme that will, hopefully, widen the pool of people who can go forward for public appointments. That lies at the heart of democracy and good decision-making, and it brings things closer to the community. I commend the motion.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly commends the Minister for Employment and Learning for providing funding for the Get on Board programme, which aims to increase and diversify participation in and access to public appointments; calls on the Minister to ask all Departments with responsibility for the delivery of the public appointments process to nominate a specific contact to engage with the programme's delivery; and further calls on the Minister to request that his Executive colleagues arrange with their non-departmental public bodies and agencies for programme participants to be able to attend meetings to gain a greater insight into their workings.

Motion made:

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

Adjournment

Quinn Insurance

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Members that the proposer of the topic will have 15 minutes. All other Members who wish to speak will have approximately six minutes.

Mr Elliott: The Quinn Insurance matter, which has been ongoing for a few weeks, is one that many believed affected only Fermanagh. However, it is an extremely important issue not only in Fermanagh but throughout the entire community. I hope to go into some detail on the wider effect during my deliberations. In the Fermanagh and South Tyrone area, the impact is widely felt, because Quinn Insurance employs almost 600 people in Enniskillen alone. We must consider some of the detail of the issues involved. I hope that the Minister will be able to provide more up-to-date detail on some of the more delicate matters that pertain to the issue.

It came as a huge shock to me and to many of the Quinn Insurance staff when, on a day in late March, they received an e-mail on their company computers that told them that the company had gone into administration. It was interesting to hear how some staff reacted to the news. They were heartbroken and felt a sense of no longer belonging and not knowing what lay ahead. The sense of insecurity was hugely difficult for members of staff to comprehend.

I do not want to pass judgement on decisions of which I have no knowledge. However, much is being said about how certain decisions were made. I do not wish to go into detail on that, but one employee summed it up extremely well when he said that the decision may have been legally right but it was commercially wrong. That demonstrated that there may have been a lack of practicality in the decision-making process. I am also concerned that the regulator in the Republic of Ireland was able to stop the company trading in the UK. I still have not received an explanation of how that worked and what involvement, if any, the Financial Services Authority in the United Kingdom had in that decision. I do not know whether discussions

and co-operation are ongoing between the regulator in the Republic of Ireland and the Financial Services Authority in the UK. I hope that the decision by Quinn Insurance to enter voluntary administration will mean that the process can move on more quickly and enable the company to resume trading in the United Kingdom. Given the lack of movement in recent days — at least I have not heard of any — it is clear that difficulties remain.

I want to concentrate on the human cost. When I talk to workers from Quinn Insurance in Fermanagh and surrounding areas, it is difficult to comprehend how serious a matter it is. We hear about three, four, five and even six members of the same family who work for that company and now face the prospect of losing their jobs. Sometimes, they even live as part of the same household. If the company cannot return to trading in the UK, there will be a huge impact on the economy in Fermanagh and surrounding areas. Not only do we think about those families, but we think of the businesses that they use — the supermarkets and the retail outlets — all of which will be hugely affected.

Then there is the knock-on effect on other businesses that are insured with Quinn Insurance Limited. I have been told by businessmen that they would not be in business had it not been for Quinn Insurance Limited. One businessman who has a fleet of lorries — I guess that he has 20 to 25 — was on the verge of going out of business, because the cost of insurance was so high. He was introduced to Quinn Insurance, which helped him to get back into the market by offering him affordable insurance, and he has remained a customer ever since. That man told me that he will not be able to trade if Quinn Insurance Limited is no longer there for him to insure his vehicles and provide public liability cover and other policies. If he goes out of business, more jobs will be lost to the area, something that Fermanagh/South Tyrone and the surrounding areas can ill afford.

I am conscious of some of the ongoing behind-the-scenes issues, but I wonder whether the Minister can give us any update on what happens now that the company is in voluntary administration. Is there any prospect of the company getting back into the UK market in the very near future? That is the only thing that will sustain the jobs in County Fermanagh and the surrounding areas. The issue is a very serious one, particularly for those who

work for the company, but it is also important to the surrounding areas and to associated employment.

Mr Gallagher: I welcome the adjournment debate secured by Tom Elliott on such a crucial issue. As he rightly said, first and foremost our thoughts have to be with the employees and their families, who have been caught up in this unfortunate situation.

More than 600 employees of Quinn Insurance are based at Enniskillen. In the Chamber today, we have the Minister, whose presence I acknowledge, and eight other Members. There are fewer than 60,000 people in Fermanagh, and 600 jobs are under threat. If that were translated to Belfast, which has a population of more than 400,000, some 4,000 jobs would be under threat. I am pretty sure that if a debate on that loss were taking place in the Chamber there would be very few empty seats.

In addition to those 600 employees, there are other jobs, not least those held by the couple of hundred people who live in Fermanagh and travel to work at Quinn Insurance in Cavan. Everybody knows about the other Quinn Group businesses, many of which are located along the Fermanagh/Cavan border and employ at least another 1,500 people from this side of the border and probably as many again in the Cavan/Monaghan area.

No wonder there has been such concern in the west about the situation and the threat to jobs. People are aware of the massive demonstrations that took place in Cavan, Dublin and Enniskillen. Those demonstrations took place against a backdrop of rising unemployment in the area, which has traditionally depended on construction and quarrying to deliver jobs.

We know that the recession has had an adverse impact on those areas. Furthermore, we all know that it is difficult to attract investment to Northern Ireland, especially to the west. I understand that Invest Northern Ireland's strategy has been to nurture what are known as indigenous companies. The Quinn businesses fall into that category. Despite all the difficulties in the west, not least with transport and peripherality, those businesses have been very successful and have made a significant contribution to the area's economy over the years. If the threats materialise, they will undoubtedly cripple the economy in all the border counties in the west.

5.00 pm

Many meetings have already taken place — some on this side of the border and some on the other side of it — and have been attended by all of us who represent the constituency. I thank the Minister again for attending those meetings and for working with Governments and government Departments in the Republic of Ireland and in the United Kingdom to ensure that everything that can possibly be done to safeguard those jobs is being done.

At this stage, the priority must be to enable Quinn Insurance to reopen in the United Kingdom market and to operate new policies and renew existing policies because, since the matter first came to light, the company has not been allowed to carry out any business in the UK. Every day that that situation continues makes the retention of the workforce less likely. Therefore, that must be our first priority. Given how the Quinn family has built the business into what it is today, we all want, ideally, it to still be in charge of the company. However, the company is now in administration, and we must look at wider possibilities. That is one option. Of course, it is possible that the company might change hands and come under new ownership. Those of us who represent the area have been made aware by the workforce that that is a worrying scenario because of the possibility that a new owner could relocate, possibly outside —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Mr Gallagher: — these islands or even outside Europe. We must do our best to ensure that, regardless of who the owners are, the jobs stay in Enniskillen.

Lord Morrow: The situation at Quinn Insurance has gripped the imagination and caused concern not only among public representatives in Fermanagh and South Tyrone but further afield. Tommy Gallagher's comments about the scale of the potential loss of jobs are right, and I hope that the word "potential" is more appropriate than the word "loss". As other Members have said, Quinn Insurance is one the main employers in the county. Indeed, I suspect that that could be true right across Northern Ireland.

MLAs' comments today might not change the situation much, but I look forward to the Minister's contribution. I hope that, when she rises to her feet to address the Assembly this afternoon, she is able to lift the dark shadow

that is hanging over the company at the moment and, indeed, over the whole of County Fermanagh and further afield.

It is not only the future of Quinn Insurance that is at stake; the Quinn Group impacts and impinges on many other people and companies. Quinn is a major employer, and many families — not only County Fermanagh — depend on it for their livelihood.

Those of us who attended meetings at Quinn headquarters and public meetings in Enniskillen saw the depth of feeling that was, understandably, shown by not only Quinn employees, but by people from other small companies based throughout County Fermanagh and further afield who are very interested in the outcome of this affair.

The regulator, rightly or wrongly, took action that made matters much more difficult. Tom Elliott may be right in saying that such action may have been necessary, but was it appropriate at this time? Some of us strongly contend that a bit more thought should have been given to the matter before such drastic action was taken. All the reports that we have heard, and we can go on only what we are being told, suggest that the company was in a sound trading position, and we have to accept that.

I trust that as a result of what has happened outside the House and what is happening in the House today, the message will come across loud and clear to the powers that be that decisive action needs to be taken, because every day that the shadow remains across that company, its future, as well as that of other companies that depend on and are interconnected with the Quinn Group, is put further in doubt.

I commend the Minister for her hands-on approach. She is, of course, a County Fermanagh representative. However, she is also the Minister, and she has put herself at the disposal of the company at very short notice to give whatever assistance she can. Those of us who attended those meetings and saw her work at first hand are singularly impressed by her action and the concern that she has shown. I have no doubt that she and her Department will be up for doing whatever is humanly possible.

I do not want to put too much pressure on the Minister, but much depends on what she says, and we look forward to her comments. I hope that she will be able to reassure the House, the Quinn Group and the whole of County

Fermanagh that things will be different, and that there is better news ahead for the Quinn Group.

Mr McHugh: Thank you, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank Tom Elliott for bringing forward the opportunity to speak on this issue, which is of prime importance to me, as a representative of that area.

Like the previous Member to speak, I also thank the Minister for her input from the start and for her willingness to work with Batt O'Keeffe and Brendan Smith from the Government in the South to try to come to some sort of understanding of the situation and do as much as possible. I know that the Minister has done an enormous amount behind the scenes. The matter is made more difficult because the company is not necessarily in either place.

There is, perhaps, a tendency for Members who are not in the Chamber to feel that the company is way down in the west somewhere and is not that terribly important to up here. However, Quinn Group workers are from areas from Antrim down to Fermanagh. That includes many private hauliers, from those who bring oil to the glass factory to those who haul glass from various sites in Antrim back to that plant, and other divisions of the Quinn Group bring employees to England and other places.

There is, therefore, a multiplier effect that goes beyond the 6,000 workers. The workers themselves would, understandably, have been very shocked by the loss of the insurance division and the fact that it is not allowed to trade.

There is some semblance of hope that Quinn Insurance may be allowed to trade in some limited way in the UK. The Minister may tell us more about that. My immediate concern is the impact on the workers — their fears over their mortgages and jobs. Many of the Enniskillen workers are kids who have just left Queen's University. They may be considering starting families and putting down roots in the area by buying a house. Indeed, their children would be the ones who would go to school there in the next three or four years. All that is up in the air because those people have to look elsewhere for their future.

We in Fermanagh have been in the same position in the past. We were derailed by the loss of our railways and infrastructure. However, this time we are being derailed from Dublin by a regulator who is now coming down hard on

all job-producing entrepreneurs, including Sean Quinn for trying to push forward his business.

Many of the regulatory and banking practices that have been allowed to operate freely over quite a few years have contributed to the difficulties and to creating a climate in which people expected to be able to obtain very large loans. They were asked to take more than they initially requested — perhaps double the loan that they wanted — and that has contributed to the present situation. If Sean Quinn had looked for a few million, he would have been asked to take a billion. If someone sought a mortgage, they were asked to take double the amount, so people now find themselves in negative equity and in great difficulties because of those practices.

At the time, even the regulators were pressured into removing legal constraints to how banking and other financial business was conducted. We heard this morning that the Irish Nationwide Building Society, which is a mutual, has got into millions of euro of debt by using people's money. That is just an example of where it all went wrong. The atmosphere that exists serves as a backdrop to the Quinn Insurance crisis. However, knowing that does not make it easier on Quinn Insurance workers, and my thoughts are with them as they attempt to see a future for themselves at this difficult time.

Sean Quinn built up the entire region of Fermanagh that we are discussing. Who or what will build it up in his place? Apart from the emigration boat, what was there previously? That was all that the people of the area ever knew previously. The story is similar in Cavan, Leitrim and a good part of Tyrone. If Quinn Insurance is allowed to fail, we must think about the impact that the loss of those jobs will have, because we will never see the likes of the company again.

Some Members mentioned precedents and whether we here can help. For example, would it be legal were the Assembly to come up with some help? Would there be a legal impediment to prevent us from helping? Would such help come under state aid? Is there precedence? Answers to all those questions might provide clarity on the matter and help Quinn workers to explore where they can look to for help. Can Invest NI do anything? I am asking questions so that we can at least investigate possibilities in

the face of the company's possibly failing in the coming weeks or months.

We want Quinn Insurance to continue and to be able to trade. Leaving the running of the business with Quinn would have provided a much better way out of the crisis than we are now looking at, which is the restriction of the whole operation.

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

Mr McHugh: I will. Thank you.

Mr McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I speak as a Member for South Antrim but directly as a result of being lobbied by constituents of mine who depend on their business relationship with Quinn Insurance.

I congratulate Tom Elliott for securing the Adjournment debate and for providing Members with an opportunity to comment. I acknowledge the degree of co-operation by all elected representatives, led at MLA level, who are working with their colleagues just across the border to make representations at every level and to provide leadership and guidance to the Quinn workers in responding to this crisis. That was very positive and encouraging; it put a focus, quite properly, on job retention and preservation.

5.15 pm

There is no dispute that the regulator was obliged to respond. There is probably nothing of value to the workers in creating a diversion of that nature. Had a regulator been steadfast in their duties earlier, it might have prevented some of the financial crisis. In this instance, however, the regulator responded to the situation as they saw it, and Sean Quinn has admitted that not everything was perfect in the administration of the business.

The administrators who were appointed and who have been made permanent by the High Court act on behalf of the regulator. It may not be a bad thing that it was the regulator who acted; otherwise the Financial Services Authority might have felt obliged to act. In that case, the issue would have become increasingly complicated. I take some encouragement from that because the nature of the response, the leadership that was given and the representation that was made has preserved the possibility that the business can be saved intact and that the administrator's role can be brought to an end as speedily as

possible. That has to be the objective at which we all aim.

Michelle Gildernew is returning from the constituency. This debate began earlier than was intended, so I hope that she will be here before it ends. I speak also as Sinn Féin's spokesperson on the economy. She and I have discussed this issue on many occasions.

It seems that the regulator's concerns, while justifiable, can be addressed by assurances from both Governments. The type of insurance and its significance may be beyond the legal powers and the resource capability of the Assembly; perhaps the Minister will have something to say about that. The words of the administrator are very strong: the company can be returned to viability. He believes that many of its divisions are very profitable.

The regulator has made it clear that his issue was with the reserves. In other words, he was concerned about the solvency of the company, not its profitability. He has said so on record. The problem is not insoluble. The united leadership that has been shown is the best hope of preserving the jobs and the local economy. If we lose jobs — even initial haemorrhaging — the domino effect could collapse the entire edifice. Thousands of jobs could be at risk and thousands more in the supply side of that vast business empire.

We have to approach the issue very cautiously and make representations to both Governments. They found ways of giving billions of pounds of public money to the banking institutions. In this instance, that type of investment may not be necessary; the loan guarantee provision may be sufficient for the company to trade its way out of crisis. Not only would that be an elegant solution, it would ensure that Quinn enterprises have a future and that the sub-regional economy could continue to depend on them.

I thank colleagues who raised this issue for debate. In particular, I register my appreciation of a high level of co-operation and common sense from the elected representatives of all parties in showing leadership in this instance.

Mr Lunn: Like Mr McLaughlin, I speak as a non-representative of Fermanagh and South Tyrone, but I have been asked to say something about the issue because of my 40 years in the insurance business before I came here. First, I sympathise with the employees in the

current situation. None of this is their fault, and, when I heard their initial reactions, which were absolutely natural, I admired their loyalty and commitment to their company. However, I wondered slightly about their passionate allegiance to Sean Quinn and the statements that he has been making, which he has had to temper and change slightly, and I am glad of that.

Mitchel McLaughlin said that the Irish Financial Regulator's interference may not be a bad thing, and I completely agree. Something had to happen. The jungle drums have been beating around Quinn Insurance on both sides of the border for years, and if the Irish Financial Regulator had intervened in a sensible way some years ago, the current situation could probably have been avoided.

I am a considerable admirer of Sean Quinn. Anybody who can build up a business empire in a relatively short time has to be admired, but he has, perhaps, always held the view that running an insurance company is much the same as running a quarry, and that is simply not the case. It involves far more complicated calculations, year on year. Proper reserves and proper claims-estimating are absolutely vital.

I read with interest some of the comments that came out of Quinn Insurance in the early stages of this episode. It was said that the group would achieve cash profits of between €45 million and €50 million in the first quarter of 2010. It was also said that the group was on target to achieve more than €20 million in cash profits each subsequent month for the remainder of 2010. That is crystal ball stuff; it is not insurance.

Quinn Insurance will reach the necessary solvency as required by the Irish Financial Regulator by the year's end. We could take that as a positive thing, or as an admission that it was nowhere near financial solvency when the news broke. The Irish Financial Regulator has, quite rightly, stepped in. It is the first regulator to have shown some backbone down there. Perhaps the Irish economy would not be in the mess that it is in if something similar had been done earlier.

The situation in respect of reserving of claims and estimation of claims is interesting, because Quinn Insurance has made a big thing out of its ability to settle claims, particularly third-party ones, quickly. For instance, if somebody were to suffer an injury as a result of being struck by a motorist who is insured by Quinn, in very

short order, over the years, somebody from the firm would arrive on their doorstep with a chequebook and offer to settle the claim. They would achieve a settlement, write a cheque and get the customer to sign a satisfaction note for full and final settlement. That greatly upset the legal profession, as I am sure that Alban Maginness will agree, because they were being kept out of the loop.

On one level, it could be said that that was saving costs. On another level, Quinn has been trying to stop claims quickly and reduce the amount to be paid. My understanding is that that is not working any more, and that a lot of claims are going to be reopened. I am aware of one case that is ongoing, which involved a very serious back injury some years ago in the Republic, and the claim was settled for €4,000. That would not even have paid for the solicitor's costs. That claim has been reopened even though there was a satisfaction note for full and final settlement. The judge has allowed it to be reopened, and the current claim is for €250,000 instead of €4,000. Who knows where that will lead and how many claims and situations will arise when word gets out that that kind of thing can happen? It has also proved that satisfaction notes just do not stand up.

Mr Elliott mentioned the FSA in the UK and its involvement in the Quinn Insurance case. Quinn Insurance is an Irish-regulated company, which has been allowed to trade in the UK by the FSA because it trusted the Irish regulator. If the Irish regulator says that the company cannot trade, the FSA is almost bound to follow its lead. It makes its own decision in the end, but, in the early stages, it must follow the regulator's lead.

I want to mention a few names before I sit down. I am old enough to remember Fire, Auto and Marine; Brandaris; Vehicle and General Insurance; and, most recently, Independent, which was a top-10 British insurance company. Independent behaved much in the same way as Quinn Insurance appears to have behaved. Its behaviour was not picked up by the regulator, and it went bust in spectacular fashion, costing the jobs of a lot more people than work for Quinn Insurance. I think that the regulator has made a wise move here. I hope that the company can be saved. I see no reason why it should not be saved, but it may have to be under different ownership. I wish it well.

The Deputy Speaker: I call Alban Maginness.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mr A Maginness): I rise as Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment. It is important that I emphasise that, because the situation with Quinn Insurance is not simply some sort of small, local problem. It is a problem that will have an impact across Northern Ireland and the border regions. Therefore it is important that the Assembly addresses the issue carefully in a considered fashion and that it stresses the importance of this difficult situation to all and for the Northern Ireland economy. I am here to show the Committee's interest in the situation, to reflect its concern and to reflect the general concern of Members.

Sean Quinn is a business phenomenon, and his companies have performed phenomenally. It is important that we register and acknowledge that and that we congratulate him on the way in which he has contributed significantly and substantially to the economy of Fermanagh, the border regions and beyond. Without his entrepreneurial genius, that would never have happened. There are questions to be asked by the regulator in relation to Quinn Insurance, and it is right that they be asked. It is also right and proper that a regulator must act if he or she sees a problem. It is not up to me or my colleagues to second-guess that decision. That is a decision that he made in good faith, and we have to accept that.

We are in this situation, and we have to work through it in order to protect the employment of those who are locally employed in Enniskillen, other parts of Fermanagh and elsewhere. A key to the preservation of those jobs is the permission that should be given by the regulator to Quinn Insurance to continue to trade in the UK; that is essential. Without that permission, the jobs are under serious threat. We must work towards the objective of getting trading restarted in the UK. The renewal of business in the UK is as important as taking on new business, because it is natural that people who cannot renew their insurance will go elsewhere. One cannot trade or drive a car without current insurance. Time, therefore, is of the essence in that regard. I am no financial expert, and there are other aspects of the business that need to be clarified and cleared up, but it is vitally important that this particular problem be addressed quickly.

5.30 pm

I hope that the Minister, who, together with colleagues from other parties in Fermanagh and South Tyrone, has done a great deal of work on the issue, can, through her good offices, exert necessary and legitimate political pressure to address the situation. I wish her well in that process.

On Thursday, the ETI Committee will receive a deputation of workers from Quinn Insurance Limited who will have an opportunity to address the Assembly through the Committee and to make representations. The Committee looks forward to what they have to say. It is of great importance to us to hear their concerns and see whether we can assist in the resolution of the situation. We will assist the Minister and the Department in any way possible, and, if we can assist on a cross-border basis, all the better, because this issue transcends the border. It is not necessarily a Northern Ireland or a Southern problem. It affects both economies and workers on both sides of the border. I hope that we can make a useful contribution to resolving this problem.

Mr Gallagher referred to the appalling threat of relocation. Sean Quinn deliberately established his enterprises and businesses in his own locality. Relocations would be very unfortunate, because Sean Quinn has put down roots in his own community and county.

Ms Gildernew: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I apologise to the proposer of the adjournment debate, the Minister and my colleagues in the Chamber for missing most of the debate. I hope that I do not repeat points already made.

This issue has been of great concern to all elected representatives and to the broader community in Fermanagh and South Tyrone. Since the news came through some weeks ago, we have been involved in dozens of meetings. I was at the meeting in Cavan with the administrator on Easter Tuesday, and we met the Irish regulator that evening. We met the Quinn workers, the management and many others in an attempt to make progress and allow the business to be reopened in the North of Ireland and in Britain and to enable the people who work in Enniskillen — more than 500 of them — to get back to work.

The workers are extremely concerned about the threat to their jobs and about their families. On Sunday, I met a woman in Brookeborough who said that she was the sole breadwinner in the family. She worked for Quinn enterprises and was very concerned about her job. We hear that right across the county.

The Quinn Group has been very good to the county of Fermanagh. Without it, we would be looking at an economic wasteland. For generations people left Fermanagh and Cavan, Leitrim and Sligo, Monaghan and Tyrone to go to England, America and other places to seek employment. However, many stayed at home and got well-paid jobs in their home townlands and villages through the Quinn Group. For that, we are grateful. We do not want to see the demise of the Quinn Group or of those jobs. We do not want to see a competitor coming in, buying up Quinn Insurance Limited and closing down those jobs or moving them to a low-wage economy somewhere else.

It is incumbent on all Members to do what they can, and all the parties in the North and the South have made a huge effort on the issue. I attended meetings with people such as Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin TD, Dr Rory O'Hanlon TD, Frank Feighan TD and Seymour Crawford TD. People from right across the political divide and the island are behind the workers of Quinn Insurance and their families.

The first meeting that we had was at the Quinn Group offices in Derrylin on Good Friday. One suggestion that was put to us was that the Government could underwrite some of the shortfall. I am sure that some Members here alluded to the fact that Quinn Insurance Ltd needed to have the money that would cover not only 100% of claims but 150% of claims in accordance with the regulations in the Twenty-six Counties. Because of the shortfall in funds and the difference in opinion on how that was calculated, the Quinn Group found itself in breach of the 150% rule, and it needed an additional surety to make up the shortfall and begin trading again.

At last week's Executive meeting, I made the point that the Executive should seek to do everything that they could with the British and Irish Governments to try to put that surety in place, to try to underwrite the shortfall in the money and to try to get the business back on its feet and allow its employees to get back

to work. Precedent has already been set. For example, we have seen the British and Irish Governments bail out the banks, and we have seen other initiatives to try to move the economic situation on. It is not outside our remit to press the British and Irish Governments to do everything that they can.

The Quinn Group is not like a big employer in a city. There is no alternative employment in Fermanagh for the Quinn workers. We need to maintain the strategic importance of Quinn Insurance as a big employer in a rural area where we do not have the infrastructure or technology that would enable us to compete on a level playing field. The Quinn Group has invested in the infrastructure and in our people, and it has kept jobs in Cavan and Fermanagh. The strategic importance of the Quinn Group must be fundamental to the actions that we take. We will continue to get behind the Quinn workers to press for the business to be reopened to enable that very talented and motivated workforce in Fermanagh to get back to work providing insurance cover for many small, rural businesses that, without Quinn's competitive cover, might find it difficult, if not impossible, to get insurance.

We are all singing from the same hymn sheet today. We are all behind the Quinn Group, and we need to do everything that we can to ensure that those jobs remain in Fermanagh.

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and

Investment (Mrs Foster): I want to thank Mr Elliott for securing this debate. As the Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment indicated, the matter perhaps merits a full debate. The importance of the issue is shown by the fact that three Members who are not from Fermanagh and South Tyrone have attended this debate, and I thank them for taking part.

I listened with interest to the points that various Members made, and I think that it will be helpful if I begin by outlining the steps that have been taken to date. I will then move on to talk about our hopes for the near future — the very near future, we hope.

As the Minister and, as has been alluded to, as a Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone, I have been closely involved in the developing situation at Quinn Insurance. As has also been alluded to, I have personally made contact with ministerial colleagues in the Republic

of Ireland, as well as with the appointed joint administrators, Quinn management and employee groups to give my support and the assistance of the Northern Ireland Executive. I am committed to doing what I can to assist the company, the administrator and the Irish Financial Regulator to find a resolution to the difficult issues in a way that maintains the vital trade and employment that Quinn provides in Northern Ireland.

Mr Elliott and Ms Gildernew made a point about consumer choice. If Quinn Insurance was not in Northern Ireland, people would be unable to avail themselves of insurance at a reasonable price, which is a point that was made strongly to me by certain sectors. That point has been well made.

Concerns were also raised by the First Minister and deputy First Minister in a joint letter to the Taoiseach that highlighted that jobs in both jurisdictions may be in jeopardy. The letter also expressed the Executive's willingness to work with the Irish Government to expedite a positive resolution to help to secure the jobs in Northern Ireland and, indeed, in the border counties of the Republic of Ireland.

Members will be aware that Quinn Insurance Limited is a subsidiary of the Quinn Group, which is a privately owned company with its headquarters in Derrylin in County Fermanagh. It is the most strategic company in that county. I think that it was Mr Gallagher who referred to the fact that foreign direct investment is not greatly evident in County Fermanagh. That is absolutely right and is one reason why the indigenous companies in that county are so important. When we had the rally with the Quinn employees in Enniskillen, I made the point that a lot of foreign direct investment companies left in the 1980s and early 1980s, and we were left with people who took up the reins and continued.

Mr Lunn asked why the employees are so loyal to Sean Quinn the man. The MLAs for Fermanagh and South Tyrone know the answer to that. The employees are loyal to Sean Quinn the man because, as Ms Gildernew said, he provided them with jobs and a reason to stay in County Fermanagh. He is the reason why it is viable for them to stay in their home county. Had Mr Lunn been at the rally in Enniskillen, he would not have needed to ask the question

about why the workers are so loyal to Sean Quinn the man and, indeed, the company.

The Quinn Group employs more than 8,000 in the UK and Ireland. It is an important employer in Northern Ireland as it provides hugely important employment opportunities in an area that does not have many such opportunities. Many Members made the point that the Quinn Group is important not only to Fermanagh and the west but to the whole of Northern Ireland. Mr McLaughlin and Mr McHugh made the point that its closure would have an impact on companies far beyond County Fermanagh. I think that it was Lord Morrow who made the point that SMEs in and around County Fermanagh will feel it most keenly if anything of a prohibitive nature were to happen to Quinn Insurance. That point has been made to all the representatives by a lot of the small businesses in the county.

Quinn Insurance started operations in Cavan in 1996 as a provider of general insurance products in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. It most recently expanded its business into the GB market in 2004. In 2003, with support from Invest NI, Quinn established a contact centre in Enniskillen, which is one of its seven major contact centres in the UK and Ireland. It employs 557 people on contracts, though temporary positions increase that figure to more than 600. The company received financial assistance and grants from Invest Northern Ireland dating back to 2003. The total financial support has been more than £5.5 million. I have to say that all but £68,000 of that has been paid out to the company.

Some comments were made about the regulator. I am certainly not going to second-guess the regulator. I take issue with Mr Lunn's comments about the projections that were provided by the company. I am not going to second-guess those projections, which I also take at face value. I am certainly not going to talk about practices of settlements and so on, because vested interests always prevail in such circumstances. When we have met representatives of the company, they have always been very open and clear. That was demonstrated by the management team that briefed MLAs and TDs three weeks ago this Friday. Quinn Insurance was very open with us, making the point that perhaps things should have been done differently and that, with hindsight, it should have paid more attention to certain areas of the business. However, that is not to say

that the company has not gone about its business in the most honest way in which it could.

5.45 pm

As Members will be aware, on 30 March, the Irish Financial Regulator made an ex parte application — an application of which no one else had notice — to the High Court in Dublin. Under the Republic of Ireland's Insurance Act, 2000, the court appointed provisional administrators. The answer to Ms Gildernew's point is that 150% solvency is an issue, and the court papers refer to the:

"incorrect calculation of solvency and reserves".

Ms Gildernew will also be aware that the papers mention the "non-disclosure" of the loan guarantees, which, for the regulator, seems to be an issue as well, and the "systems and controls" that allowed the guarantees to go unreported.

The Financial Regulator separately directed — this is the key issue for this Administration — that Quinn Insurance Ltd must cease writing new business in the UK. As the Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment said, that also means that the company cannot renew business, which is a huge part of its work.

Mr Elliott asked about the FSA's role in the decision to stop Quinn Insurance writing UK business. Quinn Insurance Ltd is registered in Cavan, and it operates therefore under the regulatory guidelines of the Irish Financial Regulator, which has sole responsibility in the matter. However, the FSA is responsible for the operation of the branch in Enniskillen, and discussions between the two regulators to resolve existing issues are ongoing. The Irish regulator is primarily in charge, and that is why it went to court and took the decision.

Mr Elliott: Can the Minister confirm whether the UK regulator is not content with parts of the operation with which the Irish regulator is content? If so, does that mean that the UK regulator can stop the company trading in the UK?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and

Investment: The Irish regulator alone makes the decision about whether the market reopens, but, obviously, it will listen to what the FSA in England says.

Existing UK policyholders will not be affected by the decision that is on the books, because all existing policies remain valid. Customers can make claims in the normal way, but that does not resolve the difficulty in which we find ourselves. As Lord Morrow said, the situation has cast a dark shadow across the company.

I will address a point that was made throughout the debate: the Irish regulator has full discretion to grant the company permission to operate in the UK. I wrote to the UK Financial Services Authority to outline the importance of Quinn Insurance and, indeed, the Quinn Group to Northern Ireland and to seek support for the Irish regulator to allow the company to begin writing some business in the UK again in order to prevent its ongoing decline and potential job losses.

Of course, every day that passes means lost revenue, which, we are told, is in the region of £1 million a day. We await the Irish regulator's announcement, which I hope will happen this week. We will then be able to see the impact on the company. Members will appreciate that, like the FSA, the Irish regulator operates wholly independently, and we respect its position and its independence. However, we want — this has always been our desire — to ensure that the Financial Regulator is in receipt of all the available information. That is where our efforts have been concentrated. We have been attempting to let the Irish regulator know about the importance of Quinn Insurance to the workforce and the local economy.

Members will be aware that, since the economic downturn began, Northern Ireland has faced immense difficulties. Inevitably, those global forces, particularly as a result of the banking crisis, have hit businesses both nationally and regionally. However, it is essential that we do everything that we can to ensure that Northern Ireland's burgeoning financial services sector remains a priority. It is a priority sector for us. We need to work with it. I will continue to work, as, I am sure, will the rest of the Executive, to reopen the UK market so that Quinn Insurance in Enniskillen can get back to work and the threat of job losses and closure — the dark shadow to which Lord Morrow referred — can be lifted from the company.

Adjourned at 5.50 pm.

Written Ministerial Statements

The content of these written ministerial statements is as received at the time from the Ministers. It has not been subject to the official reporting (Hansard) process.

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Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Swine Flu Review: Independent Chair

Published on Thursday 25 March 2010

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Mr McGimpsey): I am pleased to announce that an independently chaired review of the UK response to the 2009 H1N1 (“swine flu”) pandemic has been established. This review has been jointly commissioned, and the Chair appointed, by all four of the UK Health Ministers. The review will be chaired by Dame Deirdre Hine. The review team are situated within the Cabinet Office, which will lead the review with the full cooperation of all the UK Health Departments.

As part of the normal procedure following a major emergency response, the review will consider the effectiveness of the UK response to the 2009 pandemic and make recommendations to inform planning for any future pandemic. We expect the review team to conduct a paper review of all the key elements of the response and to interview key individuals involved. However, it will be for Dame Deirdre to determine precisely how she wishes to proceed.

The Chair will start work as soon as possible. In order that the review can inform future pandemic planning and to ensure that its findings are placed in the public domain as soon as possible, Ministers have asked that the review complete its work in time to publish a report before summer recess in any of the four nations of the UK.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my thanks to all of those who have assisted and advised on the response to the swine flu pandemic.

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Memorandum of Understanding and Supplementary Agreements

Published at 9.30 am on Friday 26 March 2010

The First Minister and the deputy First Minister (Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness):

We wish to draw attention of Members to the presentation to the Assembly today of a revised Memorandum of Understanding and supplementary agreements (MOU) between the United Kingdom Government, the Scottish Ministers, the Welsh Ministers, and the Northern Ireland Executive Committee

The revised MOU supersedes Command Paper, Cm 5240, published in December 2001 and is the principle agreement between the UK Government and the devolved administrations of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and sets out the principles which underlie relations between them. The MOU was most recently discussed at a meeting of the Joint Ministerial Committee (Domestic) in London on 10 March 2010 and agreed by the Executive on 25 March 2010.

The MOU provides for a Joint Ministerial Committee (JMC), which is the subject of a separate agreement in the MOU. In addition to the JMC agreement, three separate overarching Concordats apply broadly uniform arrangements to the handling of the Co-ordination of EU Policy Issues, Financial Assistance to Industry and International Relations. The MOU includes new arrangements setting out how the administrations will seek to avoid disputes and, where this proves impossible, how they will be resolved. We are committed to further work to improve this process particularly in relation to the final stage of this process where

a dispute remained unresolved. This will include consideration of the role of an independent chairperson.

This Memorandum is a statement of political intent, and should not be interpreted as a binding agreement. It does not create legal obligations between the parties.

We have a responsibility for promoting the devolution settlement, for ensuring effective working relations and good communication between the devolved administrations, and for helping to resolve any disputes which may arise. In the context of the MOU we will take firm action to ensure its effective operation to further develop good relations between all four administrations and seek to deliver positive outcomes for our devolved administration.

Regional Development

Department for Regional Development's Corporate and Business Plan 2010-11

Published at 1:00 pm on Friday 23 April 2010

The Minister for Regional Development

(Mr Murphy): I am pleased to inform Assembly Members of the publication of the Department for Regional Development's (DRD) Corporate and Business Plan 2010-11.

The Corporate Plan takes account of the fact that we will be facing constraints in public expenditure in the coming year. While this is a major challenge, we will continue to have a significant budget to spend in laying the foundations for the type of economy and society we all want to see in the North. We do important work for all our people and this will not change in the year ahead. Roads will still need to be built, improved and maintained. Our public transport arrangements and water and sewerage services likewise. During 2010-11 we will spend almost £1.1 billion on our roads, public transport and water programmes.

The Business Plan, which incorporates the Balanced Scorecard, details our targets for 2010-11 as we work towards delivering our longer-term Public Service Agreement targets and other commitments set out in the Programme for Government 2008-11.

The Plans are available for viewing in the Assembly Library or on the DRD internet site at www.drdni.gov.uk. However, if any member would prefer a personal hard copy, it can be obtained by contacting the Department's Strategic Planning Branch on (028) 9054 0930.

Committee Stages

Northern Ireland Assembly

Committee for the Environment

25 March 2010

Wildlife and Natural Environment Bill (NIA 5/09)

Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Cathal Boylan (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Roy Beggs
Mr Jonathan Bell
Mr John Dallat
Mr David Ford
Mr Danny Kinahan
Mr Daithí McKay
Mr Peter Weir

Witnesses:

Mr Ken Bradley	} Department of the Environment
Mr Mike Meharg	
Mr Chris Savage	

The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Boylan): Members have a copy of the Bill and have been provided with an updated version of the clause-by-clause analysis table. Members have also been provided with various additional pieces of information relating to the Bill. Some of those are contained in members' packs and some have been tabled today, and members can refer to them when discussing the relevant clause. Departmental officials are also here to answer any questions that the Committee might have.

The Committee will go through clauses 1, 2, 4, 9, 10, 15, 25, 26 and 28 and schedules 1 and 2 to seek the Committee's position on each. Today will be the last opportunity for the Committee to discuss the clauses of the Bill unless it wishes to meet again during the Easter recess.

Mr Weir: That is a fairly heavy hint.

The Deputy Chairperson: The Committee must be serious on that point. Arrangements would

have to be made if we were to meet during the Easter recess. We will try to move the process forward as positively as possible.

Clause 1 (Duty to conserve biodiversity)

The Deputy Chairperson: Members agreed to defer a decision on clause 1 until they saw the proposed departmental amendments relating to "guidance" in clause 1(4) and "conserving" in clause 1(3), as requested by the Committee. Members have been provided with a copy of the Department's proposed amendments, the first three of which relate to clause 1. Does the Committee agree with clause 1 as amended by the Department?

Mr Kinahan: I thought that "maintaining, protecting" was not going to be inserted after "fauna" in clause 1(3)(a) because it is dealt with by the use of the word "conserving" in clause 1(3).

Mr Ken Bradley (Department of the Environment): The Department proposes to include the wording "maintaining, protecting" in clause 1(3)(a) to avoid any confusion over the word "conserving" in clause 1(3).

Mr Ford: There was some discussion on that point. However, the majority of the Committee felt that the insertion of that wording would be helpful and the Department agreed. Let us register a new agreement.

Mr Weir: Bank it.

Mr Ford: Indeed, let us bank it quickly.

Mr Beggs: Is the Department satisfied that that is something that it and others can deliver? I previously raised the issue of significant changes in other areas due to climate change and suggested that it might not be possible for some areas of biodiversity to be maintained because of the speed of global change. We want to do as much as possible to prevent the loss of habitat, but I do not want to create unrealistic costs to the public or private sectors to maintain something that is not maintainable.

Mr K Bradley: The amendment is just intended to clarify the word "conserving". We felt that the word "conserving" meant maintaining or protecting. The Committee felt that additional wording should be included, so, to answer your question: yes, we are confident that "conserving" means maintaining and protecting.

Mr Beggs: My question was whether you are confident that the public and private sectors can deliver that at an affordable cost?

Mr Chris Savage (Department of the Environment): To return to the wording of clause 1, the duty relates to the functions of the public bodies, and whatever efforts are made have to be consistent with those core functions. We do not see it as being a case of those bodies facing severe sanctions if they fail to maintain something; it is about encouraging them to try to take reasonable steps towards maintaining biodiversity.

Mr Beggs: On that basis, I am content.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, subject to the Department's proposed amendments, put and agreed to.

Clause 1 agreed to.

Clause 2 (The biodiversity strategy)

The Deputy Chairperson: Members deferred a decision on the clause until they saw the proposed departmental amendment to limit the reporting period of the strategy. I refer members to the tabled copy of the Department's proposed amendment relating to clause 2.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, subject to the Department's proposed amendment, put and agreed to.

Clause 2 agreed to.

Clause 3 (Biodiversity lists)

The Deputy Chairperson: I remind members that clause 3 was agreed at last week's meeting. However, I advise members that the Department has since taken on board the Committee and stakeholders' suggestion to expand the requirements in the clause beyond the Department to all public bodies. I refer members to the tabled copy of the Department's proposed amendments relating to clause 3.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, subject to the Department's proposed amendments, put and agreed to.

Clause 3 agreed to.

Clause 4 (Protection of nests of certain birds)

The Deputy Chairperson: Members deferred a decision on clause 4 until they saw the proposed departmental amendment to include the nests of red kite, osprey, white-tailed eagle and peregrine. I refer members to the tabled copy of the Department's proposed amendment relating to clause 4. Members have been provided with additional information from the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) making the case for the barn owl to be added to the list. I also refer members to the tabled note of the meeting between the Chairperson and the Minister that indicates that the Minister would be prepared to include the barn owl if that were recommended by the Committee.

Are members content with clause 4, subject to departmental amendments to add the white-tailed eagle, the osprey, peregrine and red kite, and, as recommended by the Committee, to include the barn owl?

Mr Ford: If the Minister is willing to accept it, we should bank it.

Mr Beggs: Was there an issue about the barn owl not being nest-specific?

The Committee Clerk: There was. When we asked the Department, the information provided by the RSPB made reference to that. It suggests that although it has been willing to nest in alternative places in other parts of the UK, that has not happened in Northern Ireland.

Mr Mike Meharg (Department of the Environment): The RSPB requested that we include the barn owl. It outlined the evidence, and the Department was not concerned one way or the other. We did not feel that it was necessary to hold back on the protection of the barn owl. The barn owl has shown that it can use alternative nesting sites throughout the world, but we are not so concerned as to keep it off the list. Therefore, we advised the Minister to accept the barn owl onto the schedule.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, subject to the Department's proposed amendments, put and agreed to.

Clause 4 agreed to.

Clause 9 (Protection of basking sharks from disturbance)

The Deputy Chairperson: I remind members that they deferred a decision on clause 9 until they saw the proposed departmental amendment to add the two species of seal that are found in Northern Ireland. I refer members to the tabled copy of the Department's proposed amendments relating to clause 9.

Mr Ford: On a technical point, the title of clause 9 refers to basking sharks only and will need to be amended to refer to seals.

Mr K Bradley: That is correct.

Mr Ford: However, that is a technical point; we are agreeing the principle.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, subject to the Department's proposed amendment, put and agreed to.

Clause 9 agreed to.

Clause 15 (Discharging firearms, etc. from vehicle)

The Deputy Chairperson: I remind members that evidence provided by a witness indicated that the inclusion of clause 15 would not benefit deer keepers and may make poaching and wildlife crime easier, and members questioned the need for its inclusion. The Committee agreed to seek advice from the PSNI before making a decision, and I refer members to an e-mail from the PSNI in the tabled papers. We have a choice to make: we can accept the clause as drafted or ask that it be deleted altogether.

Mr Kinahan: We should delete it.

Mr Dallat: What exactly does clause 15 mean?

Mr C Savage: At the moment, it is not lawful to shoot deer from any vehicle. The proposal is to loosen that restriction to allow the shooting of deer from a vehicle provided that it is stationary and its engine is turned off. Its purpose is to assist the management of deer populations through culling.

Mr Dallat: I understand now. I am not very happy about that.

Mr Beggs: If the intention behind clause 15 is to assist people who manage deer stocks on private land, it is strange that two sets of witnesses from such backgrounds have opposed the idea. I had thought that it was

included to prevent poachers. I think that that line was used. However, it is clear that poachers cannot shoot from a road anyway, and I am concerned that the clause will grey the area and allow people to shoot from inside vehicles. The police will be under a greater burden to prove whether shooting happened on private land or on a public road. It would be easier to enforce a law whereby people are simply not allowed to shoot from inside vehicles.

Mr C Savage: If the police find evidence that shooting has taken place in a vehicle, the simple test is to determine whether the person in the vehicle is an authorised person. If he is not, that is an illegal act.

Mr Weir: The basic argument is that poachers' actions are illegal irrespective of whether they are carried out in a vehicle, outside a vehicle, in a moving vehicle or in a non-moving vehicle. I do not have particularly strong feelings on the matter. Is the argument that, essentially, the clause directly affects legitimate gamekeepers only and that it loosens the requirements slightly? In practical terms, it might not even make a great deal of difference one way or the other.

Mr C Savage: The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) is keen on that clause, but we have no strong feelings on it. We felt that it would be useful.

Mr Beggs: DARD may be keen on the clause, but it is clear from the evidence presented to the Committee that the proposed changes, although well intentioned, will aid and abet wildlife crime and deer poaching. That was the view of the British Deer Society and Mr John Hetherington. On that basis, I propose that the clause is deleted.

Mr Ford: I support Roy Beggs. If other members want to propose differently in the Chamber, they can do so, but the Committee has been given evidence that shows that the clause should be deleted.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, put and negatived.

Clause 15 disagreed to.

Clause 26 (Reduction in close seasons for female deer)

The Deputy Chairperson: The Committee deferred a decision on clause 26 until members

saw the proposed departmental amendment to shorten the close season for female deer by delaying its start, rather than by shortening it in the autumn. I refer members to the tabled copy of the Department's proposed amendments relating to clause 26.

Mr Kinahan: I declare an interest in that I employ John Hetherington.

The Deputy Chairperson: Is the Committee agreed with clause 26 as amended by the Department?

Mr Dallat: I am not terribly well up on shooting deer, but to shorten the close season means that more opportunities are created for shooting them. I do not believe in shooting deer, so I cannot agree to that clause. I do not want to cause a storm, but I do not want to be on record as being part of that.

Mr C Savage: There was an interesting article on the BBC this morning about the United Kingdom deer population, which is estimated to be two million, and deer are starting to appear in urban areas. That is clearly a problem, and we do not want the deer population in Northern Ireland getting out of control. The Department believes that extending the season is an important controlling mechanism.

The Deputy Chairperson: The Committee notes Mr Dallat's concern.

Mr Ford: The Department gave the Committee significant evidence as to why the close season should be shortened. The Department's original proposal involved significant welfare concerns. The amendment appears to address those concerns, so the amended clause may be better than what was originally proposed, even from John Dallat's perspective.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, subject to the Department's proposed amendment, put and agreed to.

Clause 26 agreed to.

Clause 28 (Notification of change of owner or occupier)

The Deputy Chairperson: The Committee decided to defer decision on clause 28 until it received clarification from the Department about land ownership. The Department has made clear that the clause does not apply to conacre.

Mr Ford: Assuming that the Department's statement that "occupier" does not include conacre or anything less than an 11-month let is an accurate statement of law, the clause is satisfactory.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, put and agreed to.

Clause 28 agreed to.

Clause 10 (Snares)

The Deputy Chairperson: The Department is not minded to amend clause 10, and the Committee agreed to defer it pending further discussion on two options: a complete ban on snares, or licensing their use, with no more than 12 hours allowed to elapse between checks.

I inform members that draft Committee amendments have been provided for either option. There are also three research papers on snaring guidelines, new snare technology, and the use of snares in Europe. There is also a paper on snares from the League Against Cruel Sports (LACS), which was tabled last week. I remind members that they were asked to treat the paper from the League Against Cruel Sports as confidential until published.

We must decide between a ban on snares or licensing arrangements for their use. The topic is now open for discussion.

Mr Kinahan: We should go for the licensing of snares, but with the tightest possible restrictions. There will be rare occasions where a snare has to be an option for a farmer. Therefore, I propose that we go down that route. We need a wording for that. The Scottish system, which uses a tag and a registry, seems sensible.

Mr McKay: We should go for an outright ban. All the evidence to us has shown that snares are a crude means of dealing with pests. Many domestic and other animals have suffered unnecessarily as a result of their use. Snares will not be easy to license. We are either for them or against them, and we should go for an outright ban.

Mr Dallat: I have distant memories of, as a child, seeing the results of the use of snares and I tend to be against their use. In this day and age, with new technology, and so on, there must be something more humane to use than

snares. Whether self-locking, unlocking or whatever, snares are still barbaric.

Mr Beggs: I declare a possible interest, not that I have ever used snares or intend to use them. However, I remember, as a primary-school child, going out to feed the hens and finding that they had all been killed. This morning, I assisted with putting young lambs out into a field. We should also be conscious of the mayhem that can be caused by predators, and I want snares retained as a possible option for those who want to prevent such things happening. The Committee was told about the damage done to young trees by wild animals. The licensing of snares is my preference.

Mr Ford: I also think of a memory from school days. I saw a badger, which had been caught in a snare, and which was brought into school and stuffed. In the course of the taxidermy, there had been no need to cut the underside of the body behind the front legs, because that is how the snare had reacted to the badger. The badger is supposedly a protected species.

At lambing time, there may be problems with foxes in a small number of areas, and I have more sympathy with that situation. However, such problems are rare, and some of the evidence given with respect to forestry amounts to a demand for snaring to continue permanently in a relatively indiscriminate way. I cannot accept that. It is much simpler to institute a complete ban. If there is real evidence that snaring vermin, as opposed to alternatives such as shooting, is necessary, we can re-examine the matter. However, the simplest statement that we can make is a total ban.

Mr Bell: The arguments are complex. On an emotional level, one cannot but prefer a ban on snares. They cause pain to wildlife, and if the issue were as simple as that, instituting a complete ban would be a straightforward tick-box exercise.

I have listened to people who use the countryside day and daily. I do not, but many people in Strangford do. I have spoken to people in the countryside who, in the main, have a love for animals. They have an overwhelming desire to protect the countryside, their livelihoods and wildlife. They are, in many ways, the guardians of the countryside. In my conversations with people in Strangford, no one denies that snares cause great pain, but without exception, they have told me that they want snares retained as

an option. Those are people who genuinely care about the welfare of animals.

I am hesitant about opting for a complete ban. The arguments both for and against a ban on snares must be weighed up. This morning, there has been a lot of fluffy talk about potential new technologies. I wish to hear about the proposed solutions to a ban on snares. We understand the problem, but what is the solution? If we banned snares tomorrow, what could be put in their place that is as effective and that has a proven track record of being as good, if not better? If a suitable replacement for snares is found after researching the alternatives, by all means, ban them outright. However, if that work remains to be done, it must be done before we consider an outright ban. It should not be a case of banning snares now and considering the matter later.

From listening to evidence over the past number of weeks from people whose livelihood depends, day and daily, on the countryside, it was clear that snaring is an option for them. Therefore, until we see evidence that an alternative is as good if not better than snares, I think that a rigorous licensing system is possibly the best option available to us.

Mr Kinahan: I concur entirely with Mr Bell's comments. I apologise for my "fluffy" talk earlier; that is a good term. It is difficult for farmers who live in rural areas that are near urban areas to use other options to deal with pests, such as lamping and shooting, which are often as dangerous and as nasty as snares. There is no nice way to deal with pests. I hate snares, but they must not be banned.

On another fluffy point, last Sunday, I lost all my ducks and chickens because I forgot to shut the door. I have no way in which to deal with pests. I, therefore, believe that the snare option should be kept open but that their use should be licensed as tightly as possible.

Mr McKay: I, too, live in a rural community, and none of the farmers who keeps livestock in my area uses snares or ever has. We should be mindful that the majority of the public are against the use of snares, because they view that method as out of date and inhumane. Although I understand some of the concerns that many of the stakeholders raised with the Committee, I think that we should push for an outright ban. There is an onus on the Committee to look into, and push

for, alternatives to snares. A ban on snares would help to put pressure on those within the industry to come up with alternatives. If snares are not banned, the industry will continue to use that methodology and those people will feel as though there is no onus on them to come up with an alternative. There is also an onus on the Committee to do away with that out-of-date and crude form of managing threats to livestock. We should, therefore, opt for an outright ban.

Mr Bell: You made a big statement there, Mr McKay. You said that none of the people in north Antrim uses snares.

Mr McKay: Nobody uses them in the rural community where I am from.

Mr Bell: You said that nobody in your area uses snares.

Mr McKay: I am not aware of anybody using them.

Mr Bell: You are not aware of anybody: that is an entirely different point. I agree that we should consider the alternatives. However, I find your claim difficult to believe. That is why we should gather an evidence base. I find it hard to believe that snares are not used in the North Antrim constituency.

Mr McKay: I did not make that statement.

Mr Bell: I will check the transcript.

Mr Dallat: Someone will be snared before this is over.

The Deputy Chairperson: Just as long as no one gets trapped.

Mr Ford: I wish to respond Jonathan's point about certain people in the farming community. At this point, I declare a shared interest in a family farm, which is adjacent to an Agriculture Department forest that has more than its fair share of foxes. In the past few years, there has been an odd lamb lost. However, in an area that also has hares and badgers, as well as people walking their dogs through the forest and sometimes coming down into the fields, I would not wish to consider that we, as a family, would ever put a snare on that ground, even though we do lose the odd lamb. That is not just on the basis of fluffiness but on the basis of balancing the realities of what snares do against the minimal threat.

Unlike Danny, we remember to shut our hens in every night. There are ways of dealing with those

problems, such as lambing indoors and making sure that hens and ducks are locked up at night, which do not threaten the welfare of any animal, whether domestic or wild.

The Deputy Chairperson: I am on record as saying that my party has supported, and has gone through the proper process of supporting, a ban on snares. I support my colleague Mr McKay and the way in which he has articulated his position. I sympathise. When we set out to scrutinise the Bill, we gave everybody an opportunity to express their views. There are two sides to every story. I feel for Mr Kinahan and the ducks that he lost over the weekend, but the issue is simple for me. As a party, we support a ban on snares. That is my opinion on the matter. I will give anybody an opportunity to speak.

Mr Dallat: I thought that I made it very clear that I am against snares.

The Deputy Chairperson: I am going to put the question now, Mr Dallat. Has anybody any other comment to make?

Mr Bell: I want to check something. The Ulster Farmers' Union did not —

The Committee Clerk: That organisation was silent on snares in response to the consultation.

Mr Bell: Has it not said anything?

The Committee Clerk: Not in its written submission to the consultation. It has, previously, stated an opinion.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, subject to the Committee's proposed amendment, put and agreed to.

The Deputy Chairperson: I am going to have to put it to a vote, because we have two options and there is a split in the Committee. Will those in favour of a total ban on snares please raise their hands? That is four members. Will those against a ban please raise their hands? That is three members.

Ayes

Mr Boylan, Mr Dallat, Mr Ford, Mr McKay.

Noes

Mr Beggs, Mr Bell, Mr Kinahan.

Clause 10 agreed to.

Schedule 1 (Amendments to Schedules to the Wildlife Order)

The Deputy Chairperson: I remind members that they deferred a decision on this schedule until they had seen the proposed departmental amendments to include the curlew, whinchat, lapwing and redshank as protected birds in schedule 1 to the 1985 Wildlife Order and to remove the curlew from the quarry list in schedule 2 to the 1985 Wildlife Order. I refer members to the Department's proposed amendments relating to schedule 1. I also inform members that they have been provided with departmental information on the populations of golden plover, reed bunting, raven, bull finch and whinchat. Are there any comments before I put the question?

Is the Committee content with the proposed departmental amendments including the curlew, lapwing, redshank and whinchat in schedule 1 to the Wildlife Order and removing the curlew from schedule 2 to the Wildlife Order?

Members indicated assent.

Mr Beggs: We must bear in mind the commitment to carry out a review of the status of the golden plover.

The Deputy Chairperson: I remind members that they requested draft Committee amendments to include the golden plover in schedule 1 and to remove it from schedule 2 to the 1985 Wildlife Order. Updated versions of those amendments are contained in the tabled papers.

I refer members to the tabled note of the meeting between the Chairperson and the Minister, which indicates that the Minister would not be averse to the inclusion of the golden plover if it was recommended by the Committee. An e-mail from the British Association for Shooting and Conservation in which it expresses its concerns relating to the golden plover is also tabled. I remind members that the Department has provided more information on golden plover numbers.

Mr Kinahan: There is not enough detail in the information that we have been given to allow us to deal with the issue this time round. It is safe to leave it until we review the legislation in five years' time. Is that not how we should deal with the matter?

The Deputy Chairperson: Five years is the stipulated time period. It is open to Committee

members to air their views now, but I will be putting the question to the Committee.

Mr Ford: One of the other species that was mentioned was the reed bunting. I looked at a display board alongside the Six Mile Water at the Sixmile Leisure Centre in Ballyclare yesterday, which made specific mention of the reed bunting as a species that was being treated with particular concern by the Environment Agency. Can we confirm that the Department of the Environment (DOE) is still opposed to the reed bunting being added to schedule 1?

Mr Meharg: I would not say that we are opposed to that. We do not feel the need to put it in the schedule at this stage, because the data that we have show that the reed bunting has not declined to the point at which it would be necessary to include it in the schedule.

Mr Ford: OK. Thank you.

The Deputy Chairperson: I have noted Mr Kinahan's opinion.

Is the Committee content with the draft Committee amendment to include the golden plover in schedule 1 to the Wildlife Order and to remove it from schedule 2?

Members indicated assent.

The Deputy Chairperson: I refer members to the tabled departmental list of amendments. The Department has added an amendment that confines the protection of the common skate to coastal waters. That affords it the same protection as the angel shark and is because the species is subject to the common fisheries policy beyond coastal waters.

Are members content to accept this proposed departmental amendment?

Members indicated assent.

The Deputy Chairperson: I refer members to the tabled departmental list of amendments. As it indicated to the Committee last week, the Department has included an amendment to add another two deer species, the Chinese water deer and the roe deer, to the list of non-native species.

Are members content to accept this proposed departmental amendment?

Members indicated assent.

The Deputy Chairperson: Again, I refer members to the tabled departmental list of amendments. The Department has included an amendment that specifies the relevant species of knotweed that it is including in part 2 of schedule 9 to the 1985 Wildlife Order.

Are members content to accept this proposed departmental amendment?

Members indicated assent.

The Deputy Chairperson: Members have been provided with a paper from the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds on non-invasive species. Do members wish to make any amendments or recommendations in relation to that information?

Mr Ford: The RSPB paper highlights the Scottish system, which basically bans the release of any new species unless it is done under strictly managed conditions. We have not seen any evidence of how the Scottish system operates. There may be issues that make it impossible to include such a provision in the Bill on time. It is the kind of issue that the Committee may well report on and ask the Department to keep an eye on as we look towards the maximum five-yearly revision if nothing else. I suspect that we may not be able to do much more than that at this stage. However, we should put down that marker and learn from what is happening in Scotland.

The Deputy Chairperson: Is the Committee content to go with that recommendation?

Members indicated assent.

Mr C Savage: I wish to make a comment on the RSPB paper's reference to the Scottish system. Scotland is undertaking consultation on a radical and fundamental review of what is contained in its equivalent of our Wildlife Order. That system is not in place yet, and only a basic consultation process is being conducted at the moment. It will be a number of years before any new system becomes operational in Scotland.

Mr Ford: We will be able to learn from the Scots in five years' time anyway.

The Deputy Chairperson: The Committee deferred a decision on the inclusion of the Irish hare in schedule 5 to the Wildlife Order pending further discussion. Members have been provided with the draft Committee amendment — a more recent version has been tabled — as requested, a copy of a petition to the Committee calling for

the Irish hare not to be placed in schedule 5, and information from the Department on population density over the past few years and over decades.

We have to decide whether to accept the Department's commitment as drafted or to amend schedule 5 in respect of the Irish hare.

Mr Ford: Paragraph 11 of the note of the meeting that the Chairperson had with the Minister states that, although the Minister is opposed to a commitment to a special protection order every year due to the cost, he is open to including the Irish hare in schedule 5 with a review after five years. Given that the evidence is not entirely clear and that even the optimistic evidence shows that the population of the Irish hare is just about stable at a historically low number, if the Minister is prepared to include the Irish hare in schedule 5 and to review it after five years, I suggest that we accept the Minister's generous offer and bank it quickly.

The Deputy Chairperson: Would the departmental officials like to comment on the figures?

Mr Meharg: Our report shows long-term trends from figures that are available only from game bag records. Although those trends cannot be directly compared with the survey by Queen's University over the past seven or eight years, which the Department has funded, the long-term decline may reflect other issues. It may reflect the fact that, due to a lot of gamekeeping and other measures, the populations of hares were kept high for sporting purposes over a long period and that, as the controls on the predators declined and their populations increased, hare numbers declined to a more balanced level. Therefore, although the graphs appear to show a large and historic decline, those trends cannot be used as a direct comparator. However, the experts tell us that the Irish hare population is at a historically low level.

The species action plan for the Irish hare was established 10 years ago, because it was recognised that numbers were low. A survey at that time discovered that there was one hare for every square kilometre. A target was set to double the population in as wide an area as possible over 10 years. The targets in the action plan have been achieved, and the data shows that. That is the information that we can give.

We will review the action plan, and some of the targets that we set will be attempts to maintain Irish hare numbers that we have achieved throughout Northern Ireland, with the help of Department of Agriculture and Rural Development schemes and other projects, and to improve those numbers over the next 10 years.

The Deputy Chairperson: I have been discussing the issue with some of my constituents. Mr Bell mentioned an evidence-based approach. Country people will bring you exactly to where the hares are. It seems that the hare is under threat from snares as opposed to types of sport. If you want to see a hare, you should go to the airport at Aldergrove. Is there any evidence base to show the seriousness of the threat to hares? A natural decline has taken place for one reason or another. A special protection order has been in effect for the past six years. Has part of that been enforced or has it been voluntary for sporting groups? I know that foot harriers were allowed to hunt.

Mr Meharg: Through the special protection orders, the hunting and taking of hares has been banned.

Mr K Bradley: The special protection order, by its nature, stops the taking of hares. Indirectly, therefore, it has stopped such practices as hare coursing and beagling. The special protection order is for conservation purposes. If I understood the first part of your question correctly, it was on whether the decline of the Irish hare population is to do with snares or sport.

The Deputy Chairperson: I am trying to clarify what the biggest threat is. There are conflicting views from different people, and it is up to us to establish the facts because we will make a decision that will last for five years. Mr Ford highlighted the fact that the Minister said that it is an either/or situation. I would have liked to see other proposals. A cost is associated with special protection orders. Surely to God, a higher cost will be associated with enforcement over five years.

Mr K Bradley: That is correct. It is widely recognised that one of the main threats to the Irish hare is habitat loss. Mike's staff are addressing that issue as part of the species action plan to try to encourage a greater range of habitat to promote the Irish hare. The species action plan will finish this year, and there are plans to review the targets and actions in that plan. That is where the Department is coming

from with its target to double the overall hare population from one to two for every square kilometre. The surveys to date demonstrate that that target has been reached. Now that the plan is coming to its conclusion, we are looking to review it and, as Mike said, to maintain that level, at least.

The Deputy Chairperson: I will let other members speak in a moment. The problem that I have is that it is proposed that the Irish hare can either be put on the list to be protected for five years or not, and there is no other option of monitoring or anything else. The Minister is minded to remove the special protection order. Five years is a long time. The hare has been protected for six years, the target has been achieved, and it seems that the population is growing. I have sets of figures from the Department, but other groups produce different sets of figures. From conversations with people from the countryside, I know that the hare population is stable enough in some areas.

Mr Meharg: No wildlife survey can survey every field in every area, so we survey a set area that is typical of habitat over a wider area. Mathematical geniuses at the universities multiply and take into account the landscape and other factors and come up with what they feel are populations over the whole of Northern Ireland. They then put those figures to peer review through journals and publications, and the population surveys to date have been published and reviewed by other experts. Those experts feel that the way that hare populations are surveyed not only in Northern Ireland but throughout the world results in surveys that reflect the numbers as accurately as possible.

Populations in some areas will be much denser than others; there will be hare hot spots. The airport at Aldergrove was mentioned as an example of that, and Rathlin Island is another such area. The interesting factor is that both those areas have few predators, because one is an island, and fencing and security limit the number of predators at the airport.

The Deputy Chairperson: All the predators go away on their holidays.

Mr Meharg: There can be reasons for and ways in which hare populations can be elevated.

Mr Kinahan: I am slightly uncertain: what is the Department's recommendation?

Mr K Bradley: It is to leave the protection level of the hare as it is: fully protected as a game species during the close season.

Mr Kinahan: I am happy with that.

The Deputy Chairperson: Sorry, what was that?

Mr K Bradley: At present, as a game species, the hare is fully protected during the close season.

The Deputy Chairperson: Yes, but will we continue to remove that?

Mr K Bradley: The Department's line is to retain it.

The Deputy Chairperson: I am happy enough about that.

Mr Kinahan: I agree with that, too.

Mr Ford: I accept what has just been said about protection during the close season. However, if the Department and/or the Minister are unhappy to continue with special protection orders, the level of protection afforded to the hare over the past six years that those orders have been in place will be reduced. The Irish hare is the first or the only mammal for which there is a species action plan, which has, according to the Department's estimates, achieved a very modest recovery. According to other people, the plan has achieved nothing more than a slowing down in the loss of hare numbers, compared to the historical trend. If we cannot give the highest possible protection to a species that is unique to this island and implement a meaningful species action plan, there seems little point in talking about conservation at all.

Mr McKay: David referred to point 11 of the minutes of the meeting with the Minister. How much will it cost the Department to continue to renew that protection order yearly for the next five years?

Mr K Bradley: The expense relates not so much to the special protection order as to the survey that informs it, which costs between £35,000 and £40,000 a year.

Mr McKay: So that would be £200,000 or so.

Mr Ford: How much will it cost the Department to add it to the schedule at this point? Absolutely nothing.

The Deputy Chairperson: Ken, will the special protection order remain in the close season? Is that what you are saying?

Mr K Bradley: As a game species, the Irish hare is fully protected during the close season. The special protection order is coming to an end, and it will finish at the start of the close season.

Mr Beggs: Is five years not a considerable period to wait to discover whether there has been a change in the population? Are you really saying that the Department will definitely remove the special protection order for five years?

Mr K Bradley: That five-year period relates to the quinquennial review of the schedules.

Mr Beggs: You indicated that the Minister was not minded to have any special protection order or any surveying done during those five years.

Mr K Bradley: That is correct.

Mr Beggs: That is a long period.

Mr McKay: People in the non-government sector also carry out surveys that we could rely on. What we are talking about here — to continue to renew the special protection order and to carry out the research over the next five years — will cost the Department £250,000 or very close to it.

Mr Meharg: The idea behind the species action plan and the continued annual surveys was to have data at the end of the period of the action plan that enabled a decision to be made as to whether the species required further protection or could remain as it was on the original game list with close season protection. That is the current position.

The special protection orders are brought in as a means of helping game species to recover if their numbers are low, so that hunting can be resumed and numbers can be uplifted again. The purpose of special protection orders is the conservation of the species to enable the population to rise. A special protection order applies for one year. To continue that year on year is to say that, at some stage, a decision has to be made as to whether the population has gained sufficiently for the resumption of sporting action under the game legislation.

Mr Kinahan: You are saying that it has achieved a level.

Mr Meharg: Having achieved the targets that were set out in the action plan, the Department's view is that it should go back to its original protection. That is what went forward for public consultation.

Mr K Bradley: During the consultation in 2008, the League Against Cruel Sports was the only organisation to request a full ban; no other organisation pushed for one. We specifically asked whether a full ban was wanted, and apart from LACS, no other organisation requested a full ban.

Mr Ford: I want to take up a point that Mike made. He has given the administrative description of the operation of special protection orders under the Game Preservation (Amendment) Act 2002. The reality is that the Assembly, in its first guise in 2002, enhanced the possibility of granting those special protection orders on the basis of whether the hare was under threat in Northern Ireland or any part thereof. That was the basis on which John Dallat, Edwin Poots and I, amongst others, voted for that amendment. It was passed by a substantial majority, because at that time it was the only way of enhancing the protection. That is not to say that the wish of the Assembly was that it should be done that way, but that was the only way of doing it under the game preservation legislation.

Now we are reviewing the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985. On that basis, we can say what I believe was the will of the Assembly in 2002, which is that we should be giving protection to the Irish hare because it should be protected, rather than merely fiddling around with the game legislation, which allowed temporary protection, but which was the only method available in 2002. Mr Dallat is nodding, even if the Hansard reporter did not hear him say yes.

Mr Dallat: Yes, I was. Deputy Chairperson, what are we agreeing to do?

The Chairperson: I will put it to the Committee in a minute. Five years is a long time. I would consider an alternative option and a proposal to keep monitoring, but I will not be lending my support to the inclusion of the Irish hare in schedule 5 to the Order.

Mr K Bradley: From a practical point of view, the schedules are amended by subordinate legislation. We propose a five-year review, but that does not mean that a schedule cannot be

amended at any time. There is no reason why it needs to take five years; it is feasible that we could look at in three years' time. We could make a decision then, based on the scientific evidence on the number of hares that there are. Is three or five years from now the right time to make a decision on permanent protection? Is any time the right time to make that decision? That is a matter of judgement.

Mr Meharg: There are five-year reviews of the schedules for species, because there can be particularly bad or good years for the population of different species. The past winter will have been a bad year. Therefore, the tendency is to look at five-year averages of populations to try to see any trends and whether they even out. That is why we are looking at a five-year review period for schedules and populations at UK level and in Northern Ireland.

Mr Dallat: We are starting to split hares.

The Deputy Chairperson: Very good, Mr Dallat.

We will have a vote on whether to accept schedule 1 as drafted, or to amend schedule 1 to include the Irish hare in schedule 5 to the Wildlife Order 1985.

Members in favour of schedule 1 being amended to include the Irish hare in schedule 5 to the Wildlife Order 1985 are Mr Ford, Mr Dallat, Mr McKay, and members against that proposal are Mr Beggs, Mr Kinahan, Mr Bell, and me, the Deputy Chairperson.

Is the Committee content with schedule 1 as drafted, in relation to the Irish hare?

Members indicated assent.

The Deputy Chairperson: The Committee has agreed its position relating to all the parts of schedule 1 to the Bill and must now formally agree the schedule.

Mr Ford: We received written evidence from the RSPB on the issue of schedule 4, which relates to birds that can be kept in captivity and shown for competition. It is my understanding that there is significant concern about birds being imported from the continent to England for showing, because some have been captured in the wild. If there are concerns about birds that are already on that list, that seems to raise a number of questions about the expansion of that list.

Mr C Savage: As we have explained before, the Department's system of inspecting and monitoring the activity of aviculture is a lot more robust in Northern Ireland. The inspections involve testing birds and looking at the close rings fitted to them, and the new powers to take DNA samples would strengthen our situation even further. If there are any concerns about birds being held and possibly taken from the wild, we are happy that we will have sufficient safeguards in place to mitigate any possible risk from the expansion of the list.

Mr Ford: How would DNA sampling deal with the suggestion that a bird had been imported from England? Presumably, you would have no DNA records on that bird. I accept that if a bird is supposed to have been bred in Northern Ireland, you will have access to its parents, but if it has been imported from England, how can you deal with that?

Mr Meharg: That bird will not be a member of the family that is in the collection. Therefore, if someone has a collection of birds, they will have the parentage for that collection.

Mr Ford: I accept that, but if you carry out a DNA test on a bird that does not turn up family similarities to any other bird being kept by the same owner, and the owner claims to have bought it from somebody in England, do you have any means of knowing that it was bought from a legitimate connection in England, as opposed to it being taken from the wild in Belgium?

Mr Meharg: Similar DNA records would be maintained in England. There would have to be records of where the bird came from, and we could look at the familial line on that side if we thought that an offence had been committed.

Mr Ford: I thought that we were saying that our system was more robust than in England, but you are now saying that we can depend on English records being adequate.

Mr Meharg: No; what I am saying is that the DNA can follow through on that. It can tell you where the species or the individual bird came from. If there is a query over whether a particular bird in Northern Ireland has not been bred in the community and with the parentage that the keeper is claiming, or if it has been bought in from somewhere else, we can track that purchase and go back through records to see where the bird actually came from and whether it came

from the line on the English supplier's side. We can use DNA to establish the parentage of the particular bird that came across.

Mr Ford: The bird could have come from England and both its parents could have died.

Mr Meharg: In that case, we would have to be reasonable in respect of what we could follow through.

Mr Ford: That sounds to me like you could not follow that through.

Mr Meharg: That suggestion is a little tangential in respect of how we have seen breeding being carried out in Northern Ireland.

Mr Ford: I am afraid that I remain thoroughly unconvinced.

The Deputy Chairperson: If there is a specific amendment that you would like to propose, I am sure that the Committee will be open to hearing it.

Mr Ford: I am tempted to propose the deletion of all of paragraph 4 of schedule 1. Indeed, the RSPB's evidence suggests that certain birds that are included in schedule 4 to the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985 should be removed from it as well.

The Deputy Chairperson: The RSPB has suggested the removal of the yellowhammer, twite and reed bunting from schedule 4 to the Order.

Mr Ford: Yes. Those birds are listed in schedule 4 to the Order. The question is whether any species should be added to that list.

Mr Beggs: What are those species again?

Mr Ford: The RSPB's suggestion is that the yellowhammer, twite and reed bunting should be removed from schedule 4 to the Order, rather than more species being added to that list.

The Deputy Chairperson: Obviously, we will have to bring forward an amendment that is supported by the Committee. I will, therefore, ask the Clerk of Bills to provide some clarification.

The Clerk of Bills: Due to the nature of the amendments, and because the Wildlife and Natural Environment Bill is an amending Bill, achieving what Mr Ford has suggested will be two-step operation. The first question to the Committee would be whether to amend

paragraph 4 of schedule 1 to the Bill to remove from schedule 4 to the 1985 Order the species that the Deputy Chairperson has mentioned; namely, the reed bunting, twite and yellowhammer. That is step one.

The second question that the Committee would be asked is whether it is content to amend paragraph 4 of schedule 1 to the Bill to remove sub-paragraph 2; in other words, to remove the table inserting those other species. I understand that Mr Ford also seeks to do that. Therefore, two amendments to paragraph 4 of schedule 1 are contemplated.

Mr Beggs: Can we have a departmental view on that?

Mr Meharg: The way in which aviculture works in Northern Ireland is that all the species that are listed in schedule 4 to the Order are held in collections. There is no conservation issue as regards taking species from the wild because young birds born in captivity are close-ringed immediately. The entire system operates in a closed circle. The activity of showing birds has been carried out traditionally in Northern Ireland for many years, as it has in the United Kingdom. As such, it has been licensed through the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985 for that purpose.

Our point is that there is no conservation or protection issue with regard to those species and that activity. That is why, when the list came forward, as recommended by stakeholders who are part of the aviculture family in Northern Ireland, we were happy to include those birds in the lists. There is no nature-conservation issue associated with that particular activity. It is a matter of licensing it to allow it to happen. Otherwise, the showing of those species would be illegal under the terms of the Order, because all birds are protected.

Mr Ford: According to the RSPB's evidence, it is accepted that there is widespread illegal trapping in Britain and illegal importation from the continent.

Mr Meharg: As we pointed out in earlier discussions, each year, we monitor one third of licence holders through cold calls, and we have found no evidence of illegality or tampering.

The Deputy Chairperson: Obviously, Mr Ford, you want the Committee's support to make an amendment. Personally, I do not have an issue with your proposal.

Is the Committee agreed with Schedule 1 as amended by the Department, as outlined in its list of amendments, and as amended by the Committee to include the golden plover in Schedule 1, to amend paragraph 4 of Schedule 4 to the Wildlife Order to remove yellowhammer, twite, reed bunting and remove paragraph 4 from sub-paragraph 2 of the Bill?

Members indicated assent.

Question, That the Committee is content with the schedule, subject to the Department's and the Committee's proposed amendments, put and agreed to.

Schedule 1 agreed to.

Clause 25 (Amendments to Schedules 1 to 9 to the Wildlife Order)

The Deputy Chairperson: I advise members that clause 25 cannot be agreed until members are content with schedule 1 to the Bill.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, put and agreed to.

Clause 25 agreed to.

Clause 14 (Licences under Article 18)

The Deputy Chairperson: I advise members that they agreed clause 14 last week. However, the Committee has been provided with a copy of an e-mail and a letter from Talnotry Avian Care Trust (TACT) that calls for clarification on clause 14 in relation to licences under the Wildlife and Natural Environment Bill and the crossover with zoo licensing. Members have also been provided with an extract of the Hansard transcript of TACT's evidence session on 4 March 2010 and a further tabled copy of an e-mail from TACT. I also refer members to the tabled note of the meeting between the Chairperson and the Minister indicating that the Minister is sensitive to the TACT issue but would be reluctant to base legislation on a single situation.

I also advise members that the TACT issue is referred to in the Committee's draft report on the Bill, which notes that members sought and received confirmation from the Department that it would continue to liaise with stakeholders with particular needs, such as those requiring group licences or licensing under other legislation, such as zoo licences. Furthermore, members have received a tabled e-mail from NIEA

confirming that it will handle licensing under both the Wildlife Order and zoos legislation. As a result of that information, do members wish to propose any amendments or further recommendations?

Mr Kinahan: Will the officials tell us more about how the Minister feels that the matter should be dealt with?

Mr Meharg: This is a very sensitive issue. To clarify again, when an injured animal or bird is found and someone wishes to help it, see it through its injury and release it back to the wild, those actions fall under article 5(5)(a) of the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985, whereby a person shall not be guilty of an offence by reason of: "the taking of any wild bird if he shows that the bird had been disabled otherwise than by his unlawful act and was taken solely for the purpose of tending it and releasing it when no longer disabled".

That is in the legislation. Mrs Nevinnes stated that around 1,000 animals are brought to TACT each year and 500 or so are released back into the wild. That falls completely under the terms of the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985, and no licence is required.

However, Mrs Nevinnes said that around 250 animals a year are disabled and cannot be released back into the wild. TACT provides what it terms a sanctuary for those animals. There are various concerns around the keeping of wild animals in captivity. It is an international issue. The Department has received communication from the Born Free Foundation, which is a wildlife charity of international renown. It was established in 1984 by Bill Travers and Virginia McKenna, who were part of the 'Born Free' film. It is active in 19 countries across five continents, and it has a United Kingdom office. It lobbies Governments and devolved Administrations to ensure that wild animals in captivity are treated to the highest standards, and to ensure that all zoos and animal collections are licensed under the European zoos directive, where appropriate.

In April 2009, the Born Free Foundation wrote to the NIEA, listing 17 animal collections in Northern Ireland and asking the agency to assess those for the requirement to be licensed under the appropriate regulations. All of those 17 collections were researched and lists of the animals held were passed to Mr Nick Jackson MBE, who is a zoos inspector with 27 years'

experience of inspecting European zoos. He was appointed from the Secretary of State's zoos inspectors list to carry out the assessment of the 17 Northern Ireland collections. From the lists of animals that were held by each collection, Mr Jackson recommended that two additional establishments, one of which was TACT, should be regulated under the zoos regulations.

Following that recommendation, the Northern Ireland Environment Agency sought legal advice on a number of issues relating to the definition of a zoo. The Departmental Solicitor's Office advised that TACT falls under the definition of a zoo, given the animals that are retained. We recognise that TACT carries out a lot of positive work. In fact, the Department has allocated a total of £175,000 to TACT since 2005. We support the work that it does.

We are having discussions with TACT about how we can recognise and encourage the work that it does while dealing with the sanctuary element in which certain wild animals that fall under the zoos directive are kept in captivity for the rest of their lives. The zoos directive contains very strict guidelines about the conditions under which animals must be kept. As the letter from TACT shows, meeting some of those conditions may prove difficult for that organisation to be able to afford or fund. However, those regulations are set in place as a European standard to ensure that where animals are not released back into the wild, their welfare is of the highest standards.

We work with the local vets, who do a lot of work with TACT, and the Larne divisional veterinary office (DVO). It is unaware of TACT and has not yet inspected it under the Animal Welfare Act 2006. That has to be brought into the picture so that the DVO can carry out its inspections. We can work out a protocol to ensure that the welfare of the animals in the collection is a priority; it must come absolutely first and foremost.

Under the zoos directive, there is the ability to derogate from the requirements of the licence. The Department hopes that, working under its statutory requirements and working with the local vets in Crumlin and the divisional veterinary office, it will be able to work out a protocol with TACT to ensure the best possible welfare standards for the animals retained in the collection.

Mr Kinahan: I still have concerns. If TACT brings in a bird that is badly damaged, it will fall into the zoo category. For example, TACT has a barn owl that is perfectly well but is missing a wing, and it is taken around schools to allow pupils to see what a barn owl looks like. When it is being taken around the schools it is on a string or in a cage, but when it is not being carried around it is kept in a slightly larger area. Following through on the legislation as drafted, that bird, although perfectly well, would have to be put down because it could not be released back into the wild. Is there a way that that bird could still be retained for educational purposes? It is perfectly happy, from a human point of view.

Mr Meharg: There are many views on what constitutes “happy” from the point of view of the wildlife in question. Indeed, a great deal of information has been provided on that issue by the Zoos Forum, which considers the various ethical issues surrounding animals kept in permanent captivity.

The particular bird that you have mentioned is called Barney the barn owl, and it has been part of the NIEA-funded programme for the past six or seven years. Barney has been used for educational purposes, and the Department can issue a licence under the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985 for wild birds or animals to be used in that way. However, groups that lobby the Department say that children should not see injured wildlife and should only see fully intact animals. There are two views on the issue; Mrs Nevinnes and other folk in sanctuaries have one view, and other international organisations may have another. The Department must sit in the middle and make a decision, but it does have the facility to licence that bird.

Mr Kinahan: I was hoping that the Department would introduce group licences in the Bill, as that would allow a little more freedom. The zoo designation could be very damaging to TACT, and it is the only body in Northern Ireland that deals with wild animals in that manner. If the Bill is allowed to go through in its current format, I am concerned that the zoos legislation — if we were to use it — will damage TACT. There will be a need for more modern and less agricultural premises in which to keep the birds, and once wheelchair access and everything else that is required is introduced, I am concerned that we will be getting rid of TACT, rather than helping it.

Mr Meharg: I hope that the requirement to keep animals in captivity is not the sole purpose of TACT. These issues must be looked at from the perspective of the welfare of the animals and the long-term welfare of the species held in that sanctuary.

If group licences were introduced, it could mean that TACT, and other organisations, would be licensed but not regulated under the international guidance for the welfare of animals held in collections and zoos. The Department is concerned about that.

Mr Beggs: You have indicated that the main driver for single licences is the European zoos directive. However, you also indicated that there is room for derogation from that. Can you explain what you meant by that? Although it was a number of years since I visited the sanctuary, the animals there at that time did not seem to be kept in particularly stressful conditions. I would not want a situation in which many animals are put down because there is no room for derogation.

Mr Meharg: There is the facility in the legislation to provide a derogation, to take account of special and unique circumstances. If a case for derogation were put forward, it would be for the Minister to decide upon it. I repeat that the issue here is international standards on the welfare of animals kept in captivity. That is the driver.

Mr Beggs: I fully understand that. I would not want other private collectors to go around collecting wild animals for their own amusement.

The Deputy Chairperson: Thank you, Mr Beggs. I suggest that we put that in our report and liaise with the Department on it. We will keep that to the fore. Are you content with that?

Mr Beggs: Yes.

Schedule 2 (Amendments)

The Deputy Chairperson: I remind members that they deferred their decision on this schedule until they had seen the proposed departmental amendment to include “possession” in special protection orders.

I also refer members to the tabled departmental list of amendments and advise them that the

Department has included a new clause, clause 32A, to address the issue.

Mr Ford: Unfortunately, I do not have a copy of the Game Preservation Act (Northern Ireland) 1928 in front of me. I thought that we were talking about all game, not merely game birds. The issue is specifically about the position of hares, which might have been claimed to have come from another jurisdiction.

Mr C Savage: The amendment is to section 7C(1) of the Game Preservation Act (Northern Ireland) 1928, which deals with special protection orders for game, so that is any game. The amendment inserts the words “or possession” after “purchase”.

Mr Ford: Am I reading the wrong part of it? I thought that this was the Department’s proposed new clause 32A.

Mr C Savage: No. It is basically *[Inaudible.]* to address concerns about special protection orders.

Mr Ford: Is that is the proposed subsection (3)?

Mr C Savage: Yes. I mentioned to the Committee previously that, in our experience of issuing a severe weather order this year, we identified that we could not apply it to game birds, specifically woodcock and snipe. The clause provided is meant to address that gap in the legislation to allow us to issue severe weather orders to protect game birds.

Mr Ford: Could you please read us the whole of —

The Deputy Chairperson: Excuse me, Mr Ford. Perhaps the Clerk of Bills can read that out, in order to clarify some points.

The Clerk of Bills: Do you want to hear the text? You mentioned that you did not have the Game Preservation Act (Northern Ireland) 1928 before you.

Mr Ford: Sorry; I was reading the wrong bit. I want to know how the whole of section 7C(1) will read.

The Clerk of Bills: With the insertion, it reads as follows:

“Where the Minister is satisfied that it is necessary or expedient to provide special protection for any kind of game, he may by order prohibit the killing or taking, or the sale or purchase or possession, of

game of any kind prescribed by the order, during such period not exceeding one year as shall be so prescribed.”

Mr Ford: So it extends to the killing, taking, sale, purchase or possession. Thank you.

The Deputy Chairperson: Is the Committee content with the departmental amendment to insert clause 32A, which incorporates the words “or possession”, into special protection orders for game?

Members indicated assent.

The Deputy Chairperson: I advise members that the Department has also proposed a technical amendment to schedule 2 and schedule 3 arising from its recent experience of introducing protection for game birds during the cold snap.

Question, That the Committee is content with the schedule, subject to the Department’s proposed amendment, put and agreed to.

Schedule 2 agreed to.

Schedule 3 (Repeals)

The Deputy Chairperson: I advise members that they have already agreed to schedule 3. However, are they happy to record in the Committee’s report that although schedule 3 was agreed as drafted, the Committee supports the Department’s subsequent amendment?

Members indicated assent.

Question, That the Committee is content with the schedule, subject to the Department’s proposed amendment, put and agreed to.

Schedule 3 agreed to.

Long title

The Deputy Chairperson: I advise members that the Department has proposed an amendment to the long title of the Bill to accommodate the changes being made to the Game Preservation Act 1928 as a result of the inclusion of the new clause 32A. I also advise members that they have already agreed to the long title. However, are they happy to record in the Committee’s report that, although the long title was agreed as drafted, the Committee supports the Department’s subsequent amendment?

Members indicated assent.

Question, That the Committee is content with the long title, subject to the Department's proposed amendment, put and agreed to.

Long title agreed to.

The Deputy Chairperson: I advise members that they have been provided with a draft Committee report on the Bill and a list of appendices. I also advise members that the draft report is for information only at this stage and that a final draft will be provided on 15 April 2010 for the Committee's agreement that it be printed. Are members content to agree the list of appendices and key issues in the draft report and to accept that some of those may be amended following today's discussion?

Members indicated assent.

The Deputy Chairperson: I inform members that they have been provided with an RSPB paper on the additional clauses or recommendations that that organisation wishes to see. Do members wish to discuss any further recommendations? If not, are members content that all the recommendations have been covered, allowing for additions following today's meeting?

Mr Ford: Are we sure that everything in that fairly substantial paper has been addressed? I presume that we will have opportunity to go through it again when we consider the draft report.

Mr Deputy Chairperson: We will have an opportunity to go through the draft report.

It was good to see the departmental officials in such good form. Thank you very much for your time. We will be liaising with you over the coming weeks. Enjoy your break.

Mr K Bradley: I wish to place on record my thanks to the Deputy Chairperson, the Chairperson and the rest of the Committee for the time and effort that they have invested in the Bill and for their decisions and views on it. We look forward to seeing the Committee's draft report in due course.

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 26 March 2010

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Projects Supporting Victims and Survivors of Conflict in North Down

Mr P Weir 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 north Down, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 5517/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister (Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness): The Development Grant Scheme funds projects to address the needs of victims and survivors. In excess of 400 projects were funded last year through 110 groups. Any group can apply for this funding. In North Down in the last three years, only one group applied for funding which was awarded as follows:-

- 06/07 Nil
- 07/08 £ 3, 450.00
- 08/09 Nil

Legislation Awaiting Clearance by OFMDFM

Mr K Robinson asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what steps have been taken since the Hillsborough Agreement to expedite the introduction of legislation which is awaiting clearance within the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister.

(AQO 980/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: As the Assembly will recall from the answer we gave in the Chamber on 15 February to the Member for North Down, Alan McFarland MLA, there were at that stage 17 papers concerning legislative proposals which were under consideration for inclusion in the agenda of a future meeting of the Executive. Since then the Executive has considered and agreed 8 of these papers, as well as a further paper containing legislative proposals which was received in the intervening period.

This very positive progress reflects the commitment we gave in the Hillsborough Castle Agreement both to examine the effectiveness of the Executive's procedures and to dedicate time and resources to the identification and resolution of outstanding issues.

The Executive's Working Group on Outstanding Issues has in particular provided a focused and pro-active role in facilitating consensus and enabling papers to proceed to the Executive. We are grateful to all the parties in the Executive and their representatives for the commitment which they have given, and continue to give, to this task.

As we also emphasised in our previous answer, however, Executive business is a continuous process of consultation and agreement on draft papers circulated by individual Ministers. There will therefore always be Executive papers at various stages of consideration at any point in time and in this context, it is worth noting that a further 6 legislative proposal papers have been circulated since 15 February

and are currently under consideration. A meeting of the Executive is scheduled for this Thursday and we would hope after that meeting to be able to report further progress.

Victims and Survivors' Service

Mr D O'Loan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for their assessment of the need for a new Non-departmental Public Body for the victims and survivors' service, and whether it would be more efficient to place this service within an existing body.

(AQO 981/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: A decision on the organisational model for the Victims and Survivors' Service has not been reached as yet. Any decision made regarding next steps, including the organisational model for the Service, will be taken in light of the responses to the recent public consultation, the views of the OFMDFM Committee and those of the Commission for Victims and Survivors.

Officials are currently conducting an options appraisal, assessing all potential options for the model of the Service. This options appraisal will look at both the qualitative and quantitative factors and the option that offers the best outcome for victims and survivors will be chosen.

Work on designing the Service is underway and we will be announcing our intentions regarding next steps to the sector shortly.

Policing and Justice: Funding

Mr W Irwin asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline details of the financial package arising out of the devolution of policing and justice.

(AQO 982/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: The financial package to address anticipated pressures on policing and justice budgets was set out in the Prime Minister's letter to us, published on 21 October 2009. The letter has been included as an integral part of the Hillsborough Castle Agreement of 5 February 2010.

The Prime Minister's letter offered the Executive access to the reserve to meet any exceptional security pressure, with the Treasury prepared to make available up to £37.4m in 2010/11. It indicated that capital budgets in the next CSR period would be sufficient to take forward routine, but necessary, work, to maintain the operational capacity of existing assets, to complete the police training college and to allow the Executive to reach its own view on priorities for new expenditure.

The package included increases in legal aid baselines and access to the reserve for further legal aid pressures. The UK Government offered to gift four former military sites to the Executive, with proceeds from the sale of some of them being used to meet exceptional resource pressures.

Through technical budgetary changes, the Prime Minister anticipated that pressures of £101m on police pensions could be fully addressed. An approach to hearing loss claims was proposed which would limit the financial liability of the Executive. The Prime Minister also indicated that additional funding would be made available to address potential pressures on policing, prisons and probation.

The overall purpose of the package was to provide a secure financial foundation for the new Department of Justice.

Hillsborough Agreement: Working Groups

Mr A Maskey asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the work of the groups established under the Hillsborough Agreement.

(AQO 985/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: At its meeting on 11 February, the Executive agreed to the establishment of a Working Group on Improving Executive Functions and Delivery and a Working Group on Outstanding Executive Issues.

The Working Group on Improving Executive Functions and Delivery, which is jointly chaired by the Minister for Employment and Learning and the Minister for Social Development, has met on 6 occasions and is currently drafting an Interim Report for submission to the Executive.

The Working Group on Outstanding Executive Issues, which is jointly chaired by the OFMDFM Junior Ministers, has met on 4 occasions since 11 February and has commissioned a programme of engagement and meetings in departmental, special adviser, and party forums, to examine and seek resolution of outstanding issues. We are encouraged by the progress which the Working Group has made through the identification of priorities and by providing focused attention on the achievement of resolution. Of the 47 papers awaiting referral to the Executive at the start of its work, 22 have subsequently been agreed by the Executive.

Both Working Groups are scheduled to meet again tomorrow, 23 March, to continue their work.

You will also be aware that as part of the agreement reached at Hillsborough Castle on 5 February 2010, we 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 capable of achieving cross-community support for the new and improved framework.

The Working Group has been involved in a period of intensive work to progress the task, which included a series of meetings with elected representatives and a range of stakeholders, including representatives of the residents' groups.

The working group presented its report on agreed outcomes to us and work is now progressing to prepare a draft Bill which will implement the working group's agreed outcomes. In line with the timetable set out in the Hillsborough Agreement, we are committed to completion of a draft Bill by late March/early April at which point full consultation will be undertaken.

At its meeting on 11 February, the Executive also agreed to the establishment of a Working Group to identify all matters contained in the St Andrews Agreement which had not been faithfully implemented or actioned, and to make recommendations on how progress could be made on those matters. This Working Group has not yet met pending the completion of preliminary consultation we wish to undertake with the political parties represented in the Executive.

Executive Papers

Mr K McCarthy asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether, in the interests of transparency, they will outline the details of papers awaiting clearance by the Executive.
(AQO 986/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: It is not our practice to disclose details of Executive business. The content of Executive papers and all aspects of Executive business are confidential.

Cohesion, Sharing and Integration Strategy

Mr G Robinson asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister if they can confirm that the Cohesion, Sharing and Integration Strategy will be subject to a public consultation exercise.
(AQO 987/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: The agreed Programme of Cohesion, Sharing and Integration will of course be subject to a full consultation and equality impact assessment. Our officials have circulated the draft consultation document to Departments for substantive input; it has also been shared with the OFMDFM Committee at this stage, and will be again when Departmental inputs have

been completed. Finally, the complete consultation document will be discussed by the Executive before release for a full public consultation.

Given the nature of the issues being addressed and the wider constituency involved, we hope and expect the consultation to produce many interesting and considered outcomes that will contribute to our overarching aim of achieving a society built on the principles of fairness, equality, rights, respect and responsibilities. We want to ensure that the Programme proposals will contribute to this aim.

Hillsborough Agreement: Working Groups

Mr T Burns asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline progress on the work of the working groups established under the Hillsborough Agreement.

(AQO 988/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: At its meeting on 11 February, the Executive agreed to the establishment of a Working Group on Improving Executive Functions and Delivery and a Working Group on Outstanding Executive Issues.

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Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Leader Programme in South Armagh

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the performance and management of the Leader Programme in south Armagh.

(AQW 5459/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms M Gildernew): I interpret your question to refer to Newry & Mourne LEADER which was a local action group (LAG) delivering funding under the last LEADER+ Programme.

Newry & Mourne LAG was awarded a LEADER+ budget of £1,733,573.38 with which it funded 48 projects at an overall cost of £1,560,292.87, including over £300k incurred on administration and publicity costs.

Newry & Mourne's contribution to the LEADER+ Programme's overall outputs were:-

- 126 micro-businesses supported;
- 6 new micro-businesses created or assisted;
- 134 new full time jobs created;
- 3 training or advice programmes delivered; and
- 123 people participating in training programmes.

In addition it undertook pre-development exercises to investigate the potential of 3 co-operation projects none of which progressed to delivery.

Presently the LEADER+ programme is being closed and officials are working to agree a final financial outturn figure with the Department. Department officials are currently in discussion with the Newry & Mourne board for recovery of outstanding advance funds provided to Newry & Mourne LAG for the purpose of Programme implementation.

As a local action group Newry & Mourne has been required to manage their allocated funds in accordance with operating rules set out by my Department. To ensure compliance Newry & Mourne LAG, in kind with all other LAGs, have been subject to a series of system and control inspections by both Departmental and EU audit. Any findings are being addressed.

Financial Incentives Available to Farmers

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail (i) the financial incentives available to farmers to maintain bio-diversity on their land; and (ii) the take-up rate of these incentives, broken down by constituency.

(AQW 5466/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: (i) My Department provides financial incentives to farmers to maintain biodiversity through agri-environment schemes. There are two schemes within the Rural Development Programme 2007-13:

- Countryside Management Scheme (CMS)
- Organic Farming Scheme (OFS).

The application periods for these schemes are advertised in the local press and announced on the DARD and RDP websites.

These schemes are voluntary for farmers and are part-financed by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD). Details of the payment rates for these schemes can be viewed at:

www.ruralni.gov.uk/index/environment/countrysidemanagement/schemes

(ii) With regard to the take-up rate of agri-environment schemes, DARD does not hold figures for individual constituencies; however the figures in Table 1 show scheme participation per county at March 2010.

Table 1: Agri-environment scheme participation

County	Scheme participants*
Antrim	2529
Armagh	1308
Down	1813
Fermanagh	1859
Derry/Londonderry	2090
Tyrone	2877
Total	12476

* These figures include participants in the Environmentally Sensitive Areas Scheme, the Organic Farming Scheme and the previous and current Countryside Management Schemes.

Car Park at Hillsborough Forest

Mr J Craig asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development when her Department plans to resurface the car park at Hillsborough Forest to improve conditions for users.

(AQW 5502/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Routine maintenance work was carried out to the car park at Hillsborough forest during the first week in March. This work will maintain the car park in a good condition for visitors to the forest.

Grants to Protect Biodiversity on Farms

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what measures are in place to monitor people who receive grants to protect bio-diversity on their farms.

(AQW 5541/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Elements of agri-environment schemes aim to enhance biodiversity. These schemes are co-financed by the European Union and therefore are subject to a minimum inspection rate of 5%.

Farms are inspected to determine compliance with the terms of their agri-environment agreement.

Single Farm Payment

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many people in East Antrim are in receipt of the single farm payment.

(AQW 5616/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: A total of 38,609 potentially eligible applications were submitted under the 2009 Single Farm Payment Scheme. As at 16 March 2010, 36,918 claims had been paid and a further 41 had been determined as not due payment because of the application of penalties under scheme rules.

The Department does not hold Single Farm Payment details on a constituency basis. The data is currently held by county and postcode where known. A list of the total number of applications received and the total number of claims finalised as at 16 March 2010 for each postcode area is attached at Annex A.

Annex A**SFP 2009 - FINALISED CLAIM DETAILS (BY POSTCODE)**

Postcode	Claimed	Paid	Penalties applied and no payment due.
BT1	25	16	0
BT2	9	2	1
BT3	0	0	0
BT4	29	25	0
BT5	40	38	0
BT6	30	30	0
BT7	11	9	0
BT8	115	106	0
BT9	38	33	1
BT10	6	6	0
BT11	6	6	0
BT12	1	0	0
BT13	4	4	0
BT14	44	40	0
BT15	12	11	0
BT16	42	40	0
BT17	18	16	0
BT18	53	53	0
BT19	79	78	0
BT20	17	16	0
BT21	68	65	0
BT22	463	457	0
BT23	584	558	0
BT24	595	560	4
BT25	587	560	2
BT26	260	251	1
BT27	298	290	0
BT28	366	352	0
BT29	380	365	3
BT30	887	859	0
BT31	475	463	0

Postcode	Claimed	Paid	Penalties applied and no payment due.
BT32	763	741	1
BT33	144	132	0
BT34	1965	1894	0
BT35	1716	1629	2
BT36	113	108	0
BT37	14	14	0
BT38	197	189	1
BT39	641	629	0
BT40	430	414	0
BT41	701	675	0
BT42	1003	971	0
BT43	467	454	0
BT44	1426	1367	2
BT45	1474	1428	0
BT46	547	533	0
BT47	1111	1058	1
BT48	65	61	0
BT49	457	434	0
BT50	0	0	0
BT51	941	896	1
BT52	162	153	0
BT53	884	858	0
BT54	282	259	0
BT55	31	30	0
BT56	39	37	0
BT57	201	195	0
BT58	0	0	0
BT59	0	0	0
BT60	1683	1622	1
BT61	485	462	0
BT62	679	658	1
BT63	303	294	0
BT64	0	0	0

Postcode	Claimed	Paid	Penalties applied and no payment due.
BT65	5	3	0
BT66	303	288	0
BT67	339	327	0
BT68	87	85	0
BT69	205	199	0
BT70	1372	1322	1
BT71	1150	1108	2
BT72	0	0	0
BT73	0	0	0
BT74	533	473	4
BT75	301	286	0
BT76	204	194	0
BT77	140	133	0
BT78	1737	1639	4
BT79	1587	1505	2
BT80	1038	995	4
BT81	559	532	0
BT82	665	630	1
BT83	0	0	0
BT84	0	0	0
BT85	0	0	0
BT86	0	0	0
BT87	0	0	0
BT88	0	0	0
BT89	0	0	0
BT90	0	0	0
BT91	0	0	0
BT92	1570	1473	1
BT93	1024	973	0
BT94	1013	975	0
No BT Postcode Held	311	274	0
Totals	38609	36918	41

Department's Rural-proofing Policies and Practices

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of each Department's rural proofing policies and practices.

(AQW 5671/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: My Department has responsibility for ensuring that rural proofing is effectively developed and that Departments have adequate guidance to carry out rural proofing. However, each Department must apply the process of rural proofing to its own policies.

I am clear that the rural proofing process needs to be enhanced and I have secured support from the Executive to do so. Feedback from a recent questionnaire to policy makers across government has demonstrated that while there is some knowledge of rural proofing and the rural proofing tools, policy makers in all Departments require further support and guidance in undertaking rural proofing.

An enhanced rural proofing process is under development by my officials and is being designed to ensure that rural issues are considered at the early stages of the policy development process. We are also looking to ensure that appropriate rural evidence is used by Departments when making policy decisions. Additional training will be provided to policy makers, the rural proofing guidance and tools are being improved and an enhanced advice and support service is being provided by DARD to all Departments.

Undesignated Watercourses

Mr C McDevitt asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many undesignated watercourses in greater Belfast have been designated since 2000.

(AQW 5676/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: From 2000, twenty watercourses in the Greater Belfast area have been designated for maintenance at public expense by the Drainage Council for NI.

Testing of Badgers for Tuberculosis and Other Diseases

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what progress has been made in the testing of badgers for tuberculosis and other diseases.

(AQW 5686/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Research continues to investigate the prevalence of bovine TB in badgers through the collection and post-mortem examination of badgers killed by road traffic accidents (RTA). This RTA Survey, which is carried out by the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI), has found a prevalence of TB infection of some 17% in the badgers examined.

It is recognised that the RTA Survey may not provide an accurate assessment of TB prevalence in badgers across the north due to the inherent bias in the survey. Only badgers which have been killed on the road are included and badger carcasses are more likely to be reported by farmers who have had herd breakdowns.

RTA Survey badgers are not tested for any diseases other than TB.

Plans have been developed to undertake a Badger Prevalence Study, subject to the necessary funding being secured. The purpose of the Study would be to obtain representative baseline information on the level of and the geographic distribution of TB infection in badgers here to assist with the development of future TB control strategies

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

Irish-language Projects

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much has been spent by his Department on Irish-language projects in each constituency, in each of the past three years, broken down by project.

(AQW 5530/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr N McCausland): The funding by the Department of Culture Arts and Leisure to Irish-language projects for the last three years is shown below under the headings of the key funding streams. As many of the projects funded are not exclusive to a specific geographical area, the parliamentary constituency is shown where applicable.

Foras na Gaeilge

The funding provided by DCAL to Foras na Gaeilge for the last three calendar years (which is the Agency's financial year) is detailed below. DCAL funds to 25% of Foras na Gaeilge's (the Irish Language Agency) budget.

2007	£3.459m	2008	£4.074m	2009	£3.949m
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The funding allocated to projects by Foras na Gaeilge is shown in the tables below under its three strategic themes of Education, Community Sector, and Public Sector and the Arts.

EDUCATION

2007		
Ainm na Scéime (Name of Scheme)	Toghcheantar (Constituency)	Líon Airgid (Amount of Funding)
An tÁisaonad (St.Mary's)	Belfast West	£382,149.00
B-DAG Cyf / AWEN (Welsh – Irish Trans Teaching Materials)		£28,550.00
Scéim Óige (Youth Scheme)	Belfast West	£1,600.00
Scéim Óige (Youth Scheme)	Belfast North	£17,555.00
Scéim Óige (Youth Scheme)	Mid Ulster	£2,100.00
Scéim Óige (Youth Scheme)	South Down	£1,670.00
Scéim Óige (Youth Scheme)	South Antrim	£1,266.00
Scéim Óige (Youth Scheme)	Belfast South	£1,410.00
Campaí Samhraidh (Summer Camp)	Belfast North	£4,430.00
Campaí Samhraidh (Summer Camp)	South Down	£4,900.00
Campaí Samhraidh (Summer Camp)	Newry & Armagh	£3,700.00
Campaí Samhraidh (Summer Camp)	Mid Ulster	£7,000.00
Campaí Samhraidh (Summer Camp)	Belfast West	£2,250.00

2007		
Ainm na Scéime (Name of Scheme)	Toghcheantar (Constituency)	Líon Airgid (Amount of Funding)
Áiseanna & acmhainní teag. (Teaching Resouces for Schools)	South Antrim	£6,500.00
Áiseanna & acmhainní teag. (Teaching Resouces for Schools)	Fermanagh & South Tyrone	£19,508.00
Áiseanna & acmhainní teag. (Teaching Resouces for Schools)	Belfast West	£23,698.49
Luathoideachas (Preschool education)	Belfast West	£55,195.00
Seirbhísí oideachasúla (Educational Service)	Belfast West	£3,500.00
Sparántachtaí 3ú léibhéal (3rd level scholarship)	Belfast West	£3,000.00

2008		
Ainm na Scéime (Name of Scheme)	Toghcheantar (Constituency)	Líon Airgid (Amount of Funding)
An tÁisaonad (St.Mary's)	Belfast West	£367,637.00
B-DAG Cyf / AWEN (Welsh – Irish Trans Teaching Materials)		£13,407.00
Áiseanna & acmhainní teag. (Schools Teaching Resouces)	Foyle	£12,721.00
Áiseanna & acmhainní teag. (Schools Teaching Resouces)	Belfast North	£30,478.00
Scéim Óige (Youth Scheme)	South Down	£8,400.00
Scéim Óige (Youth Scheme)	Foyle	£6,831.00
Scéim Óige (Youth Scheme)	Belfast South	£2,900.00
Scéim Óige (Youth Scheme)	West Tyrone	£6,963.00
Scéim Óige (Youth Scheme)	Mid Ulster	£3,480.00
Scéim Óige (Youth Scheme)	Belfast North	£3,480.00
Scéim Óige (Youth Scheme)	Belfast West	£3,500.00

2008		
Ainm na Scéime (Name of Scheme)	Toghcheantar (Constituency)	Líon Airgid (Amount of Funding)
Luathoideachas (Preschool education)	Belfast West	£75,000.00
Campaí Samhraidh (Summer Camp)	Newry & Armagh	£5,880.00
Campaí Samhraidh (Summer Camp)	Fermanagh & South Tyrone	£3,642.00
Campaí Samhraidh (Summer Camp)	Mid Ulster	£4,535.00
Campaí Samhraidh (Summer Camp)	Belfast North	£2,370.00
Campaí Samhraidh (Summer Camp)	South Down	£6,500.00
Campaí Samhraidh (Summer Camp)	Foyle	£3,250.00
Campaí Samhraidh (Summer Camp)	Belfast South	£3,430.00
Campaí Samhraidh (Summer Camp)	North Antrim	£3,500.00
Tacaíocht don ghaelscolaíocht (Support for Irish-Medium Education)	Belfast South	£1,561.00
Tacaíocht don ghaelscolaíocht (Support for Irish-Medium Education)	Belfast West	£2,570.00

2009		
Ainm na Scéime (Name of Scheme)	Toghcheantar (Constituency)	Líon Airgid (Amount of Funding)
Campaí Samhraidh (Summer Camp)	West Tyrone	£10,500.00
Campaí Samhraidh (Summer Camp)	Upper Bann	£3,500.00
Campaí Samhraidh (Summer Camp)	South Down	£3,500.00
Campaí Samhraidh (Summer Camp)	Newry & Armagh	£6,070.00
Campaí Samhraidh (Summer Camp)	Mid Ulster	£3,500.00
Campaí Samhraidh (Summer Camp)	Foyle	£3,500.00

2009		
Ainm na Scéime (Name of Scheme)	Toghcheantar (Constituency)	Líon Airgid (Amount of Funding)
Campaí Samhraidh (Summer Camp)	Fermanagh/South Tyrone	£3,728.00
Campaí Samhraidh (Summer Camp)	Belfast West	£10,461.28
Campaí Samhraidh (Summer Camp)	Belfast South	£7,000.00
Campaí Samhraidh (Summer Camp)	Belfast North	£2,040.00
Scéim d'Imeachtaí Óige (Youth Scheme)	South Down	£6,700.00
Scéim d'Imeachtaí Óige (Youth Scheme)	North Antrim	£2,770.00
Scéim d'Imeachtaí Óige (Youth Scheme)	Mid Ulster	£1,650.00
Scéim d'Imeachtaí Óige (Youth Scheme)	Foyle	£3,500.00
Scéim d'Imeachtaí Óige (Youth Scheme)	Belfast West	£10,500.00
Scéim d'Imeachtaí Óige (Youth Scheme)	Belfast South	£10,468.00
Scéim d'Imeachtaí Óige (Youth Scheme)	Belfast North	£6,730.00
Oideachas Fadsaoil (Life Long Learning)	Foyle	£2,000.00
Scéim Fhoghlaim Ríomhchuidithe (E Learning Scheme)	East Londonderry	£9,200.00
Scéim Fhoghlaim Ríomhchuidithe (E Learning Scheme)	Belfast South	£7,200.00
Scéim Scoláireachtaí na gColáistí Oideachais (Scholarship Scheme for Teacher Training)	Belfast West	£2,850.00
Scéim Thacaíocht don Ghaelscolaíocht (Support for Irish-Medium Education)	Belfast West	£131,771.00
Scéim Athbhreithnithe Curacalaim (Curriculum Review)	Belfast North	£8,333.00

PUBLIC SECTOR AND THE ARTS

2007		
Programme	Parliamentary Constituency	Amount
Féilte & imeachtaí cultúrtha (Festivals)	Newry and Armagh	£3,500.00
Féilte & imeachtaí cultúrtha (Festivals)	Foyle	£995.00
Féilte & imeachtaí cultúrtha (Festivals)	Belfast West	£500.00
Féilte & imeachtaí cultúrtha (Festivals)	Foyle	£8,000.00
Féilte & imeachtaí cultúrtha (Festivals)	Foyle	£15,000.00
Féilte & imeachtaí cultúrtha (Festivals)	Belfast North	£1,500.00
Féilte & imeachtaí cultúrtha (Festivals)	Newry and Armagh	£1,000.00
Organisations	South Down	£4,000.00
Ócáidí, léachtaí & comhdhál (Events, conferences & lectures)	Belfast North	£480.00
Ócáidí, léachtaí & comhdhál (Events, conferences & lectures)	Belfast North	£2,371.00
Ócáidí, léachtaí & comhdhál (Events, conferences & lectures)	Belfast North	£500.00
Ócáidí, léachtaí & comhdhál (Events, conferences & lectures)	Belfast South	£10,000.00
Complachtaí dramaíochta srl (drama companies)	Belfast North	£6,000.00
Complachtaí dramaíochta srl (drama companies)	Belfast West	£85,000.00
Complachtaí dramaíochta srl (drama companies)	Belfast North	£6,500.00
Complachtaí dramaíochta srl (drama companies)	Belfast West	£11,500.00
Ealaíontóirí cónaithe / Writers in residence	Belfast South	£20,000.00
Foilsíúcháin/DD's & scannáin (Publications and films)	Newry and Armagh	£6,500.00

2007		
Programme	Parliamentary Constituency	Amount
Foilsíúcháin/DD's & scannáin (Publications and films)	Belfast South	£20,000.00
Foilsíúcháin/DD's & scannáin (Publications and films)	South Antrim	£5,000.00
Foilsíúcháin/DD's & scannáin (Publications and films)	Belfast South	£14,000.00
Foilsíúcháin/DD's & scannáin (Publications and films)	Belfast South	£7,500.00
Foilsíúcháin/DD's & scannáin (Publications and films)	Newry and Armagh	£6,500.00
Foilsíúcháin/DD's & scannáin (Publications and films)	South Down	£1,000.00
Comhthions. le U-S Agency (Joint projects with U-S Agency)	East Antrim	£4,000.00
Ceard. Scríbh./Ealaíon. srl. / (Workshops)	Newry and Armagh	£7,000.00
Scéim na mBeath faoi €5k/£3.5k/ (Biography scheme under €5k)	Upper Bann	£2,500.00
Scéim na hOifigí (Irish-language officer scheme)	Foyle	£47,286.75
Scéim na hOifigí (Irish-language officer scheme)	Mid Ulster	£31,524.50
Scéim na hOifigí (Irish-language officer scheme)	Fermanagh and South Tyrone	£31,524.50

2008		
Programme	Parliamentary Constituency	Amount
Scéim Pobail (Community Scheme)	Foyle	£3,350.00
Scéim Pobail (Community Scheme)	Belfast North	£3,400.00
Scéim Pobail (Community Scheme)	South Down	£1,740.00
Scéim Pobail (Community Scheme)	Newry & Armagh	£3,200.00
Scéim Pobail (Community Scheme)	North Antrim	£1,725.00
Scéim Pobail (Community Scheme)	West Belfast	£2,000.00

2008		
Programme	Parliamentary Constituency	Amount
Scéim Pobail (Community Scheme)	N/A	£2,870.00
Scéim Pobail (Community Scheme)	Newry & Armagh	£1,600.00
Scéim Pobail (Community Scheme)	Destined Ltd	£1,800.00
Scéim Pobail (Community Scheme)	Belfast West	£2,000.00
Scéim Pobail (Community Scheme)	North Antrim	£2,000.00
Scéim Pobail (Community Scheme)	Fermanagh & South Tyrone	£2,000.00
Scéim Pobail (Community Scheme)		£3,500.00
Iontaobhas Ultach Trust (Core Funding)		£244,957.00
Forbairt Feirste (Core Funding)	Belfast West	£116,069.00
POBAL (Core Funding)	Belfast West	£180,030.00
Comhaltas Uladh (Core Funding)	Mid Ulster	£73,000.00
Scéim comhar. dhá theangach (Bi-lingual signage)	Belfast West	£850.00
Scéim comhar. dhá theangach (Bi-lingual signage)		£750.00
Scéim comhar. dhá theangach (Bi-lingual signage)	Belfast West	£846.00
Scéim comhar. dhá theangach (Bi-lingual signage)	Belfast West	£303.00
Scéim comhar. dhá theangach (Bi-lingual signage)		£1,000.00
Scéim comhar. dhá theangach (Bi-lingual signage)	Belfast West	£1,000.00
Scéim comhar. dhá theangach (Bi-lingual signage)	Belfast West	£681.50
Scéim comhar. dhá theangach (Bi-lingual signage)	Belfast West	£440.00
Scéim comhar. dhá theangach (Bi-lingual signage)		£775.00
Scéim comhar. dhá theangach (Bi-lingual signage)		£400.00

2008		
Programme	Parliamentary Constituency	Amount
Scéim comhar. dhá theangach (Bi-lingual signage)		£750.00
Scéim comhar. dhá theangach (Bi-lingual signage)	Belfast West	£50.00
Scéim comhar. dhá theangach (Bi-lingual signage)	Belfast North	£1,000.00
Scéim comhar. dhá theangach (Bi-lingual signage)	Belfast West	£1,000.00
Scéim comhar. dhá theangach (Bi-lingual signage)	Belfast North	£750.00
Scéim comhar. dhá theangach (Bi-lingual signage)		£750.00
Scéim comhar. dhá theangach (Bi-lingual signage)	Belfast North	£750.00
An earnáil gnó (Other Business Scheme)	South Down	£8,000.00
An earnáil gnó (Other Business Scheme)	Belfast West	£8,000.00
An tUltach (Magazine)	Mid Ulster	£20,000.00
Raidió Fáilte	Belfast West	£4,531.00
Raidió Fáilte	Belfast West	£93,068.00

2009		
Programme	Parliamentary Constituency	Amount
Festivals and events	Belfast West	£1,000.00
Festivals and events	Newry and Armagh	£4,000.00
Festivals and events	Newry and Armagh	£2,000.00
Festivals and events	West Tyrone	£2,000.00
Drama companies	Belfast West	£95,000.00
Writers in residence	Belfast South	£20,000.00

COMMUNITY SECTOR

2007		
Ainm Scéime (Name of Scheme)	Toghcheantar (Constituency)	Méid (Amount) £
An Ghaeilge sa Phobal (Irish in the community)	Thar 18 Toghcheantar across all constituencies	£26,146.00
Bunmhaoiniú (core funding)	North Belfast	£333,747.00
Bunmhaoiniú (core funding)	West Belfast	£394,397.00
Scéim na nIonad (venue scheme)	West Belfast	£89,087.00
Scéim na nIonad (venue scheme)	Foyle	£117,961.00
Scéim Phobail Gaeilge (Irish community scheme)	North Belfast	£38,431.00
Scéim Phobail Gaeilge (Irish community scheme)	South Belfast	£49,420.00
Scéim Phobail Gaeilge (Irish community scheme)	West Tyrone	£46,833.00
Scéim Phobail Gaeilge (Irish community scheme)	West Belfast	£14,101.00
Scéim Phobail Gaeilge (Irish community scheme)	Foyle	£24,322.00
Scéim Phobail Gaeilge (Irish community scheme)	Down	£22,508.00
Scéimeanna gnó (business schemes)	Thar 18 Toghcheantar across all constituencies	£18,661.00
Clár Caipitil an Ghaelárais (capital)	Foyle	£154,883.00

2008		
Ainm Scéime (Name of Scheme)	Toghcheantar (Constituency)	Méid (Amount) £
An Ghaeilge sa Phobal (Irish in the community)	North Belfast	£8,625.00
An Ghaeilge sa Phobal (Irish in the community)	Foyle	£5,150.00
An Ghaeilge sa Phobal (Irish in the community)	North Antrim	£3,740.00
An Ghaeilge sa Phobal (Irish in the community)	Newry Armagh	£4,800.00

2008		
Ainm Scéime (Name of Scheme)	Toghcheantar (Constituency)	Méid (Amount) £
An Ghaeilge sa Phobal (Irish in the community)	West Belfast	£4,000.00
An Ghaeilge sa Phobal (Irish in the community)	Fermanagh South Tyrone	£2,000.00
Bunmhaoiniú (core funding)	North Belfast	£367,261.00
Bunmhaoiniú (core funding)	West Belfast	£389,167.00
Scéim na nIonad (venue scheme)	West Belfast	£91,763.00
Scéim na nIonad (venue scheme)	Foyle	£121,504.00
Scéim Phobail Gaeilge (Irish community scheme)	North Belfast	£80,586.00
Scéim Phobail Gaeilge (Irish community scheme)	Mid Ulster	£67,959.00
Scéim Phobail Gaeilge (Irish community scheme)	South Belfast	£61,560.00
Scéim Phobail Gaeilge (Irish community scheme)	West Tyrone	£39,421.00
Scéim Phobail Gaeilge (Irish community scheme)	North Antrim	£42,240.00
Scéim Phobail Gaeilge (Irish community scheme)	West Belfast	£36,954.00
Scéim Phobail Gaeilge (Irish community scheme)	West Belfast	£36,346.00
Scéim Phobail Gaeilge (Irish community scheme)	Foyle	£37,450.00
Scéim Phobail Gaeilge (Irish community scheme)	Down	£37,110.00
Scéimeanna gnó (business schemes)	Thar 18 Toghcheantar across all constituencies	£12,095.00
Clár Caipitil an Ghaelárais (Capital)	Foyle	£395,117.00

2009		
Ainm Scéime (Name of Scheme)	Toghcheantar (Constituency)	Méid (Amount) £
An Ghaeilge sa Phobal (Irish in the community)	North Belfast	£5,500.00

2009		
Ainm Scéime (Name of Scheme)	Toghcheantar (Constituency)	Méid (Amount) £
An Ghaeilge sa Phobal (Irish in the community)	West Belfast	£5,930.00
An Ghaeilge sa Phobal (Irish in the community)	South Belfast	£2,500.00
An Ghaeilge sa Phobal (Irish in the community)	Fermanagh / South Tyrone	£710.00
An Ghaeilge sa Phobal (Irish in the community)	North Antrim	£1,310.00
Bunmhaoiniú (core funding)	North Belfast	£337,957.00
Bunmhaoiniú (core funding)	West Belfast	£389,167.00
Scéim na nIonad (venue scheme)	West Belfast	£91,763.00
Scéim na nIonad (venue scheme)	Foyle	£121,500.00
Scéim Phobail Gaeilge (Irish community scheme)	North Belfast	£80,729.00
Scéim Phobail Gaeilge (Irish community scheme)	Mid Ulster	£65,450.00
Scéim Phobail Gaeilge (Irish community scheme)	South Belfast	£68,860.00
Scéim Phobail Gaeilge (Irish community scheme)	West Tyrone	£40,450.00
Scéim Phobail Gaeilge (Irish community scheme)	North Antrim	£37,533.00
Scéim Phobail Gaeilge (Irish community scheme)	West Belfast	£34,933.00
Scéim Phobail Gaeilge (Irish community scheme)	West Belfast	£34,480.00
Scéim Phobail Gaeilge (Irish community scheme)	Foyle	£38,174.00
Scéim Phobail Gaeilge (Irish community scheme)	Down	£36,404.00
Clár Caipitil an Ghaelárais (Capital)	Foyle	£42,110.00

AN CHEATHRÚ GAELTACHTA TEO (THE GAELTACHT QUARTER DEVELOPMENT COMPANY) (WEST BELFAST)

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
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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
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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
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ARTS COUNCIL OF NORTHERN IRELAND

The Arts Council of Northern Ireland has awarded the following revenue funding to 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.

ARTS COUNCIL OF NORTHERN IRELAND

2007-2008		
Programme	Parliamentary Constituency	Amount
Aisling Ghear Annual Support for Organisations Programme (ASOP Funding)	West Belfast	67,320
Culturlann McAdam O'Fiaich ASOP Funding	West Belfast	161,290
An Gaelaras Ltd ASOP Funding	Foyle	84,867

ARTS COUNCIL OF NORTHERN IRELAND

2008-2009		
Programme	Parliamentary Constituency	Amount
McCracken Cultural Society Summer School	North Belfast	17,140
An Droichead Teo Traditional Arts Programme	South Belfast	40,000

2008-2009		
Programme	Parliamentary Constituency	Amount
Culturlann McAdam O'Fiaich ASOP Funding	West Belfast	161,290
POBAL Irish-Language Arts Development Officer	West Belfast	25,000
An Gaelaras Ltd ASOP Funding	West Belfast	67,320
An Gaelaras Ltd ASOP Funding	Foyle	113,500
An Gaelaras Ltd Capacity Building Project	Foyle	50,000

ARTS COUNCIL OF NORTHERN IRELAND

2009-2010		
Programme	Parliamentary Constituency	Amount
McCracken Cultural Society Summer School	North Belfast	13,670
An Droichead Teo Access to traditional arts and community arts	South Belfast	40,000
POBAL Multi-disciplinary Irish-language Arts	West Belfast	25,000
Aisling Ghear ASOP Funding	West Belfast	67,320
Culturlann McAdam O'Fiaich ASOP Funding	West Belfast	161,290
POBAL ASOP Funding	West Belfast	25,000
An Gaelaras Ltd ASOP Funding	Foyle	137,000

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.

**AN CULTURLANN
INTEGRATED DEVELOPMENT FUND**

Year	Amount	Belfast West
2007/2008	34,500	Capital Grant
2008/2009	17,409	Design Team Fees
TOTAL	51,909	

Arts Infrastructure (DCAL)

Year	Amount	Belfast West
2008/2009	7,000	Equipment Grant

**AN GAELARAS
NORTH-WEST CHALLENGE FUND**

Year	Amount	Foyle
2007/2008	239,279	Capital Grant
2008/2009	243,721	Capital Grant
TOTAL	483,000	

**AN GAELARAS
INTEGRATED DEVELOPMENT FUND**

Year	Amount	Foyle
2008/2009	500,000	Capital Grant
TOTAL	500,000	

ARTS INFRASTRUCTURE (DCAL)

Year	Amount	Foyle
2009/2010	75,000	Capital Grant
2009/2010	19,978	Equipment Grant
TOTAL	94,978	

Traditional Music Projects

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much has been spent by his Department on traditional music projects in each constituency, in each of the past three years, broken down by project.

(AQW 5532/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: My Department's funding for the arts, including traditional music, is disbursed by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland. A total of £1,840,669 has been awarded by the Arts Council to traditional music projects since April 2007. This is made up of both exchequer and Lottery funding as detailed below. Please note that spend on the more recent awards may be ongoing.

	Exchequer (£)	Lottery (£)	Total (£)
2007-08	387,755	239,054	626,809
2008-09	509,831	122,010	631,841
2009-10	394,632	187,387	582,019
Total (£)	1,292,218	548,451	1,840,669

A further breakdown of the total funding by year, constituency and individual project is attached.

ARTS COUNCIL FUNDING ALLOCATED TO TRADITIONAL MUSIC PROJECTS

Constituency	Year	Organisation	Project Title	Award	Programme	Fund	Capital / revenue
Belfast East	2007-2008	Gilnahirk Pipe Band	Purchase of musical instruments	£3,438.00	Musical Instruments	Lottery	Capital
		Ballycoan Pipe Band	Small grant funding	£5,970.00	Awards for All	Lottery	Revenue
			Total 2007-2008	£9,408.00			
	2009-2010	Ulster Volunteer Flute Band	Purchase Musical Instruments	£4,583.00	Musical Instruments	Exchequer	Revenue
			Total 2009-2010	£4,583.00			
Belfast North	2007-2008	Hounds of Ulster	Purchase Musical Instruments	£5,000.00	Musical Instruments	Lottery	Capital
		Pride of Ardayne	Purchase Musical Instruments	£4,605.00	Musical Instruments	Lottery	Capital
			Total 2007-2008	£9,605.00			
	2008-2009	First Old Boys Association Silver Band	Musical Instruments for Bands	£4,900.00	Musical Instruments	Exchequer	Capital
		McCracken Cultural Society	10th McCracken Summer School	£17,140.00			
			Total 2008-2009	£22,040.00			
	2009-2010	McCracken Cultural Society	11th McCracken Summer School	£13,670.00	Lottery - Project Funding	Lottery	Revenue

Constituency	Year	Organisation	Project Title	Award	Programme	Fund	Capital / revenue
Belfast North		Glengormley School of Traditional Irish Music	Small grant funding	£4,000.00	Small Grants Programme	Lottery	Revenue
		Fifes and Drums Historical and Musical Society	Purchase Musical Instruments	£4,878.00	Musical Instruments	Exchequer	Capital
			Total 2009-2010	£22,548.00			
Belfast South	2007-2008	Belfast and District Set Dancing and Traditional Music Society	ASOP		ASOP	Exchequer	Revenue
		An Droichead	Trad Arts Access Programme	£40,500.00	Lottery - Project Funding	Lottery	Revenue
		The Jigtime Programme of Irish Music	ASOP	£25,000.00	ASOP	Exchequer	Revenue
		The Francis McPeake School of Music	ASOP	£50,000.00	ASOP	Exchequer	Revenue

Constituency	Year	Organisation	Project Title	Award	Programme	Fund	Capital / revenue
Belfast South		Ceoltai Eireann	An Beirinneach - Songs and Music of an Irish Harper (in partnership with Aibhlin McCrann)	£9,000.00	Turas	Exchequer	Revenue
			Total 2007-2008	£143,607.00			
	2008-2009	Belfast and District Set Dancing and Traditional Music Society	ASOP	£20,000.00	ASOP	Exchequer	Revenue
		The Jigtime Programme of Irish Music	ASOP	£25,000.00	ASOP	Exchequer	Revenue
		An Droichead	Traditional Arts Programme	£40,000.00	Lottery - Project Funding	Lottery	Revenue
			Total 2008-2009	£85,000.00			
	2009-2010	Belfast and District Set Dancing and Traditional Music Society	ASOP	£20,000.00	ASOP	Exchequer	Revenue
		An Droichead	Traditional Arts Programme	£40,000.00	Lottery - Project Funding	Lottery	Revenue
			Total 2009-2010	£60,000.00			

Constituency	Year	Organisation	Project Title	Award	Programme	Fund	Capital / revenue
Belfast West	2007-2008	Andersonstown Traditional & Contemporary Music School	ASOP		ASOP	Exchequer	Revenue
		Teresa Clarke	Purchase a fiddle	£3,000.00	SIAP	Lottery	Revenue
		Desmond Adams	Purchase of new flute	£3,000.00	SIAP	Lottery	Revenue
			Total 2007-2008	£56,000.00			
	2008-2009	Andersonstown Traditional & Contemporary Music School	ASOP		ASOP	Exchequer	Revenue
			Total 2008-2009	£50,000.00			
	2009-2010	Andersonstown Traditional & Contemporary Music School	ASOP		ASOP	Exchequer	Revenue
		James Rainey	Attendance at Milwaukee Irish Fest, USA August 2009	£500.00	SIAP	Exchequer	Revenue
		Upper Falls Protestant Boys	Purchase of musical instruments	£4,658.00	Musical Instruments	Exchequer	Capital
		Upper Falls Protestant Boys	Small Grant funding	£2,500.00	Small Grant Programme	Lottery	Revenue

Constituency	Year	Organisation	Project Title	Award	Programme	Fund	Capital / revenue
East Antrim			Total 2009-2010	£57,658.00			
	2007-2008	George A Dummigan Accordion Band	Musical Instruments for Bands	£4,000.00	Musical Instruments	Exchequer	Capital
			Total 2007-2008	£4,000.00			
	2009-2010	Ulster Grenadiers Flute Band	Musical Instruments for Bands	£4,266.00	Musical Instruments	Exchequer	Capital
			Total 2009-2010	£4,266.00			
East Londonderry	2007-2008	Kilrea Pipe Band	Purchase of musical instruments	£4,999.00	Musical Instruments	Lottery	Capital
			Total 2007-2008	£4,999.00			
	2008-2009	Castlerock Pipe Band	Musical Instruments for Bands	£5,000.00	Musical Instruments	Exchequer	Capital
		The Hamilton Flute Band	Small grant funding	£800.00	Awards for All	Lottery	Revenue
		Coleraine Fife & Drum Band	Purchase of Musical Instruments	£4,492.00	Musical Instruments	Exchequer	Capital
			Total 2008-2009	£10,292.00			

Constituency	Year	Organisation	Project Title	Award	Programme	Fund	Capital / revenue
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	2009-2010	Roe Valley Folk Club	Roe Valley Folk Club Workshops, Performances & Festival	£9,000.00	Small Grants Programme	Lottery	Revenue
			Total 2009-2010	£9,000.00			
	2007-2008	Magheraboy Flute Band	Purchase of Musical Instruments	£3,723.00	Musical Instruments	Lottery	Capital
		Ardboe Central Youth Band	Small grant funding	£5,000.00	Awards for All	Lottery	Revenue
		Bawn Silver Band	Small grant funding	£5,500.00	Awards for All	Lottery	Revenue
		Dyan Pipe Band	Purchase of Musical Instruments	£4,594.00	Musical Instruments	Lottery	Capital
		Magheraboy Flute Band	Small grant funding	£3,600.00	Awards for All	Lottery	Revenue
		Letterbreen Silver Band	Small grant funding	£5,795.00	Awards for All	Lottery	Revenue
		Lisnaskea Silver Band	Purchase of Musical Instruments	£5,000.00	Musical Instruments	Lottery	Capital
Total 2007-2008				£33,212.00			

Constituency	Year	Organisation	Project Title	Award	Programme	Fund	Capital / revenue
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	2008-2009	Murley Concert Band (Junior band of Murley Silver Band)	Purchase of Musical Instruments	£5,000.00	Musical Instruments	Exchequer	Capital
		Moybrone Pipe Band	Purchase Musical Instruments	£4,657.00	Musical Instruments	Exchequer	Capital
		Ballindarragh Accordion Band	Small grant funding	£1,850.00	Awards for All	Lottery	Revenue
		W.J. Armstrong Memorial Pipe Band	Purchase Musical Instruments	£4,995.00	Musical Instruments	Exchequer	Capital
		Magheraboy Flute Band	Small grant funding	£3,520.00	Awards For All	Lottery	Revenue
		Moygashel Sons of Ulster	Equipment - Musical Instruments for Bands	£4,183.00	Musical Instruments	Exchequer	Capital
		Letterbren Silver Band	Small grant funding	£4,000.00	Awards For All	Lottery	Revenue
		Lisnaskea Accordion Band	Accordians	£5,000.00	Musical Instruments	Exchequer	Capital
		Ballyreagh Silver Band	Musical Instruments for Bands	£4,923.00	Musical Instruments	Exchequer	Capital
		Benburb Memorial Pipe Band	Purchase Musical Instruments	£3,472.00	Musical Instruments	Exchequer	Capital

Constituency	Year	Organisation	Project Title	Award	Programme	Fund	Capital / revenue
Fermanagh and South Tyrone		Tamlaght Pipe Band	Purchase of Musical Instruments	£5,000.00	Musical Instruments	Exchequer	Capital
		Tempo Accordion Band	Purchase of musical instruments	£4,191.00	Musical Instruments	Exchequer	Capital
		Tubrid Pipe Band	Purchase of musical instruments	£4,688.00	Musical Instruments	Exchequer	Capital
			Total 2008-2009	£55,479.00			
	2009-2010	The Mummerys Foundation	Anglo Irish Influences	£12,000.00	Lottery - Project Funding	Lottery	Revenue
		The Brantry Bard Sessions Group	The Bard Sessions	£6,125.00	Small Grants Programme	Lottery	Revenue
		Letterbrren Silver Band	Small grant funding	£3,725.00	Small Grants Programme	Lottery	Revenue
		Lisbellaw Accordion Band	Purchase Musical Instruments	£5,000.00	Musical Instruments	Exchequer	Capital
		Wattlebridge Accordion Band	Purchase Musical Instruments	£5,000.00	Musical Instruments	Exchequer	Capital
		Garvary Flute Band	Purchase musical instruments	£5,000.00	Musical Instruments	Exchequer	Capital
			Total 2009-2010	£36,850.00			

Constituency	Year	Organisation	Project Title	Award	Programme	Fund	Capital / revenue
Foyle	2007-2008	Marcas O Murchu	The Flight of the Earls - Imirce na nIarlai (in partnership with Oisín Mac Diarmada)	£3,780.00	Turas	Exchequer	Revenue
			Emigration Songs (in partnership with Jackie Boyce)	£7,450.00	Turas	Exchequer	Revenue
			Purchase of Musical Instruments	£5,000.00	Musical Instruments	Lottery	Capital
	2009-2010	Pride of the Orange and Blue Flute Band	Total 2007-2008	£16,230.00			
			Small grant funding	£10,000.00	Small Grant Programme	Lottery	Revenue
			Total 2009-2010	£10,000.00			
	2007-2008	Northern Ireland Piping & Drumming School	ASOP	£48,510.00	ASOP	Exchequer	Revenue
			Purchase of new Tenor Banjo and computer equipment and software	£3,000.00	SIAP	Lottery	Revenue
Lagan Valley							

Constituency	Year	Organisation	Project Title	Award	Programme	Fund	Capital / revenue
Lagan Valley		Dromara Highland Pipe Band	Purchase of Musical Instruments	£5,000.00	Musical Instruments	Lottery	Capital
		Crumlin Young Loyalist Flute Band	Purchase Musical Instruments	£3,963.00	Musical Instruments	Lottery	Capital
		Blaris Accordion Band		£4,688.00	Musical Instruments	Lottery	Capital
			Total 2007-2008	£65,161.00			
	2008-2009	Northern Ireland Piping & Drumming School	ASOP	£56,510.00	ASOP	Exchequer	Revenue
		Royal Scottish Pipe Band Association	Project Manager Post	£20,000.00	Lottery - Project Funding	Lottery	Revenue
		Stephen Dunne	Purchase guitar	£2,500.00	SIAP	Lottery	Revenue
		Roses Lane Ends Temperance Flute Band	Purchase of Instruments	£3,750.00	Musical Instruments	Exchequer	Capital
		Skeogh Flute Band	Musical Instrument Application	£5,000.00	Musical Instruments	Exchequer	Capital
			Total 2008-2009	£87,760.00			
	2009-2010	Northern Ireland Piping & Drumming School	ASOP	£56,510.00	ASOP	Exchequer	Revenue

Constituency	Year	Organisation	Project Title	Award	Programme	Fund	Capital / revenue
Lagan Valley		Brendan Mulholland	Performance at Milwaukee Irish Festival, August 2009	£500.00	SIAP	Exchequer	Revenue
		Ballylesson Old Boys' Flute Band	Purchase Musical Instruments	£4,889.00	Musical Instruments	Exchequer	Capital
		Glenavy Accordion Band	Purchase musical instruments	£4,680.00	Musical Instruments	Exchequer	Capital
			Total 2009-2010	£66,579.00			
Mid-Ulster	2007-2008	Curran Flute Band	Purchase of Musical Instruments	£5,000.00	Musical Instruments	Lottery	Capital
		Knockloughrim Accordion Band		£5,000.00	Musical Instruments	Lottery	Capital
		Drumnaglough Flute Band		£3,775.00	Musical Instruments	Lottery	Capital
		Drumconvis Young Defenders Flute Band			Musical Instruments	Lottery	Capital
		Money more Accordion Band	Small Grant funding	£2,880.00	Awards for All	Lottery	Revenue
		Newmills Silver Band	Purchase of Musical Instruments	£5,000.00	Musical Instruments	Lottery	Capital

Constituency	Year	Organisation	Project Title	Award	Programme	Fund	Capital / revenue
Mid-Ulster		Coalisland Jubilee Accordion Band		£4,688.00	Musical Instruments	Lottery	Capital
		Gortagilly Musical Society	Purchase of musical instruments	£5,000.00	Musical Instruments	Lottery	Capital
		Ballymoughan Flute Band	Musical Instruments for Bands	£2,280.00	Musical Instruments	Lottery	Capital
		Maghera Sons of William		£2,730.00	Musical Instruments	Lottery	Capital
		Ballymacall True Blues Flute Band	Purchase of musical instruments	£4,300.00	Musical Instruments	Lottery	Capital
			Total 2007-2008	£44,448.00			
	2008-2009	Montober Flute Band	Purchase of Musical Instruments	£4,958.00	Musical Instruments	Exchequer	Capital
		Pomeroy Flute Band	Purchase of Musical Instruments	£4,736.00	Musical Instruments	Exchequer	Capital
		Killymuck Accordion Band	Purchase Musical Instruments	£5,000.00	Musical Instruments	Exchequer	Capital
		Ballinacross Accordion Band	Purchase Musical Instruments	£4,995.00	Musical Instruments	Exchequer	Capital

Constituency	Year	Organisation	Project Title	Award	Programme	Fund	Capital / revenue
Mid-Ulster		Mulnagore Coronation Accordion Band	Purchase Musical Instruments	£4,862.00	Musical Instruments	Exchequer	Capital
		Sgt White Memorial Flute Band	Purchasing of musical instruments	£4,255.00	Musical Instruments	Exchequer	Capital
		Kilnaslee Pipe Band	Musical Instrument Request	£3,789.00	Musical Instruments	Exchequer	Capital
		Tamlaghtmore Flute Band	Purchase of musical instruments	£4,005.00	Musical Instruments	Exchequer	Capital
			Total 2008-2009	£36,600.00			
	2009-2010	Magheraglass Flute Band	Musical Instruments application 2009/10	£4,557.00	Musical Instruments	Exchequer	Capital
		Loughinsholin Cultural Music Group	Musical Instruments for Bands application 2009/10	£4,984.00	Musical Instruments	Exchequer	Capital
		Eden Accordion Band & Concert Music Society	Purchase Musical Instruments	£5,000.00	Musical Instruments	Exchequer	Capital
		Tobermore Loyal Flute Band	Purchase Music Instruments	£3,735.00	Musical Instruments	Exchequer	Capital

Constituency	Year	Organisation	Project Title	Award	Programme	Fund	Capital / revenue
Mid-Ulster		Megargy Accordion Band	Purchase of musical instruments	£4,866.00	Musical Instruments	Exchequer	Capital
		Blackhill Flute Band	Purchase musical instruments	£2,477.00	Musical Instruments	Exchequer	Capital
			Total 2009-2010	£25,619.00			
Newry and Armagh	2007-2008	Armagh Pipers Club	ASOP	£27,225.00	ASOP	Exchequer	Revenue
		The Armagh Rhymers Workers Co-operative Ltd	ASOP	£65,000.00	ASOP	Exchequer	Revenue
		Aghavilly Accordion Band	Small grant funding	£500.00	Awards for All	Lottery	Revenue
		Ms Patricia Daly	A Journey of Discovery (in partnership with Stefano Uberti)	£10,000.00	Turas	Exchequer	Revenue
		Len Graham	Travel to teach at Central Missouri Celtic Arts Association April 2008	£300.00	SIAP	Exchequer	Revenue
		Carnagh Accordion Band	Purchase of musical instruments	£2,295.00	Musical Instruments	Lottery	Capital

Constituency	Year	Organisation	Project Title	Award	Programme	Fund	Capital / revenue
Newry and Armagh		Tyrone Ditches Pipe Band	Purchase of musical instruments	£5,000.00	Musical Instruments	Lottery	Capital
			Total 2007-2008	£110,320.00			
	2008-2009	The Armagh Rhymers Workers Co-operative Ltd	ASOP	£67,000.00	ASOP	Exchequer	Revenue
		Tommy Makem Festival of Traditional and Folk Song	2008 Festival	£5,000.00	Arts Development Fund	Exchequer	Revenue
		Ms Patricia Daly	Develop a ambitious composition for harp	£15,000.00	SIAP	Exchequer	Revenue
		Mrs Pat Prunty	Make CD recording	£2,000.00	SIAP	Lottery	Revenue
			Total 2008-2009	£89,000.00			
	2009-2010	The Armagh Rhymers Workers Co-operative Ltd	ASOP	£67,000.00	ASOP	Exchequer	Revenue
		Armagh Pipers Club	Small grant funding	£1,700.00	Small Grants Programme	Lottery	Revenue
		Armagh Harpers Association	Harp Festival	£3,000.00	Small Grants Programme	Lottery	Revenue

Constituency	Year	Organisation	Project Title	Award	Programme	Fund	Capital / revenue
Newry and Armagh		Sorcha Meehan	Purchase of Fiddle & Bow	£2,775.00	SIAP	Lottery	Revenue
		Martin Meehan	Purchase of Uilleann Pipes - 2009	£2,500.00	SIAP	Lottery	Revenue
		Len Graham	Attendance at American Conference for Irish Studies at Monmouth University West Long Branch New Jersey, USA - September 18-19 2009.	£300.00	SIAP	Exchequer	Revenue
		Josephine Keegan	The Keegan Tunes, Book Three	£3,625.00	SIAP	Lottery	Revenue
		Len Graham	To research, compile, publish and record a comprehensive collection of Ulster traditional song for young people.	£15,000.00	SIAP	Exchequer	Revenue
		Crossmaglen Youth Band	Purchase of Musical Instruments	£5,000.00	Musical Instruments	Exchequer	Capital

Constituency	Year	Organisation	Project Title	Award	Programme	Fund	Capital / revenue
Newry and Armagh			Total 2009-2010	£100,900.00			
North Antrim	2007-2008	Comhaltas Ceoltoiri Eireann (Glens of Antrim Branch)	Exchange trip between the branches of Glens of Antrim Comhaltas and Ballyduff Comhaltas in Waterford	£9,943.00	Turas	Exchequer	Revenue
		Cullybackey Pipe Band		£5,000.00	Musical Instruments	Lottery	Capital
		Pride of the Maine	Purchase of musical instruments	£3,690.00	Musical Instruments	Lottery	Capital
		Ballymacconnelly Sons of Conquerors	Purchase of Musical Instruments	£4,525.00	Musical Instruments	Lottery	Capital
		Killycoogan Accordion Band	Purchase of Musical Instruments	£5,000.00	Musical Instruments	Lottery	Capital
			Total 2007-2008	£28,158.00			
	2008-2009	Ulster-Scots Folk Orchestra Association	Performances & Educational Outreach Projects	£10,000.00	Arts Development Fund	Exchequer	Revenue

Constituency	Year	Organisation	Project Title	Award	Programme	Fund	Capital / revenue
North Antrim		Drumaheagles Young Defenders Flute Band	Musical Instrument Application	£5,000.00	Musical Instruments	Exchequer	Capital
		Ballymena and Harryville Young Conqueror	Purchase of instruments	£5,000.00	Musical Instruments	Exchequer	Capital
			Total 2008-2009	£20,000.00			
	2009-2010	Castlegore Amateur Flute Band	Purchase Musical Instruments	£5,000.00	Musical Instruments	Exchequer	Capital
		Armagh Old Boys Silver Band	Small grant funding	£4,000.00	Small Grant Programme	Lottery	Revenue
			Total 2009-2010	£9,000.00			
North Down	2007-2008	Open House Traditional Arts Festival Ltd	Over here... mini fest	£4,000.00	DCAL Monitoring Round	Exchequer	Revenue
		Ballykeel Loyal Sons of Ulster Flute Band	Purchase of Musical Instruments	£5,000.00	Musical Instruments	Lottery	Capital
			Total 2007-2008	£9,000.00			
	2008-2009	Open House Traditional Arts Festival Ltd	ASOP	£60,000.00	ASOP	Exchequer	Revenue

Constituency	Year	Organisation	Project Title	Award	Programme	Fund	Capital / revenue
North Down		Open House Traditional Arts Festival Ltd	Rediscovering Northern Ireland	£4,010.00	SIAP	Exchequer	Revenue
			Total 2008-2009	£64,010.00			
	2009-2010	Open House Traditional Arts Festival Ltd	ASOP	£60,000.00	ASOP	Exchequer	Revenue
		Ballykeel Conservative Flute Band	Purchase Musical Instruments	£4,845.00	Musical Instruments	Exchequer	Capital
			Total 2009-2010	£64,845.00			
South Antrim	2007-2008	Muckamore Cultural Music Society	Purchase of Instruments	£5,000.00	Musical Instruments	Lottery	Capital
			Total 2007-2008	£5,000.00			
South Down	2007-2008	Grallagh Unionist Flute Band	Application to purchase musical instruments	£5,000.00	Musical Instruments	Lottery	Capital
		Upper Crossgare Pipe Band	Small grant funding	£5,000.00	Awards for All	Lottery	Revenue
			Total 2007-2008	£10,000.00			

Constituency	Year	Organisation	Project Title	Award	Programme	Fund	Capital / revenue
South Down	2008-2009	Ballymartin Pipe Band	Purchase of musical instruments	£4,999.00	Musical Instruments	Exchequer	Capital
		Holy Cross Accordion Band Atticall	Small grant funding	£2,200.00	Awards for All	Lottery	Revenue
			Total 2008-2009	£7,199.00			
	2009-2010	Loretta Phillips	Record an album	£1,800.00	SIAP	Lottery	Revenue
		Upper Crossgare Pipe Band	Musical Instruments for Bands application 2009/10	£5,000.00	Musical Instruments	Exchequer	Capital
		Upper Crossgare Pipe Band	Small grant funding	£2,250.00	Small Grant Programme	Lottery	Revenue
		Schomberg Fife and Drum Band	Purchase Musical Instruments	£2,741.00	Musical Instruments	Exchequer	Capital
		Closkelt Highland Pipe Band	Purchase Musical Instruments	£3,663.00	Musical Instruments	Exchequer	Capital
		South Down Defenders Flute Band	Purchase Musical Instruments	£5,000.00	Musical Instruments	Exchequer	Capital
			Total 2009-2010	£20,454.00			

Constituency	Year	Organisation	Project Title	Award	Programme	Fund	Capital / revenue
Strangford	2007-2008	York Island Arts and Heritage Association	Liberty Days Festival Aug 07 - See business case	£6,440.00	Arts Development Fund	Exchequer	Revenue
			Total 2007-2008	£6,440.00			
	2008-2009	William Strain William Lightbody Memorial Flute Band	Purchase of Musical Instrument	£5,000.00	Musical Instruments	Exchequer	Capital
		Raffrey Pipe Band	Purchase of instruments	£4,999.00	Musical Instruments	Exchequer	Capital
			Total 2008-2009	£9,999.00			
	2009-2010	Bradley Parker	Attending piping lessons in Scotland twice per month.	£1,342.00	SIAP	Lottery	Revenue
			Total 2009-2010	£1,342.00			
	2007-2008	Mid Armagh Community Network	ASOP funding	£23,000.00	ASOP	Exchequer	Revenue
		St John's Independent Accordion Band	Small grant funding	£8,320.00	Awards for All	Lottery	Revenue
Upper Bann		All Set Cross Cultural Project	ASOP	£25,000.00		Exchequer	Revenue

Constituency	Year	Organisation	Project Title	Award	Programme	Fund	Capital / revenue
Upper Bann			Total 2007-2008	£56,320.00			
	2008-2009	All Set Cross Cultural Project	ASOP	£25,000.00	ASOP	Exchequer	Revenue
		Mid Armagh Community Network	ASOP One Year Funding 2008/2009	£23,000.00	ASOP	Exchequer	Revenue
		Dean Patrick Warner	Recording of Piano Accordion Traditional Irish Music CD	£2,000.00	SIAP	Lottery	Revenue
		Clogher Youth & Music Club	The purchase of musical instruments	£3,750.00	Musical Instruments	Exchequer	Capital
			Total 2008-2009	£53,750.00			
	2009-2010	All Set Cross Cultural Project	ASOP	£25,000.00	ASOP	Exchequer	Revenue
		Mid Armagh Community Network	MACN Project for 2009/2010	£27,190.00	Lottery - Project Funding	Lottery	Revenue
			Total 2009-2010	£52,190.00			
West Tyrone	2007-2008	St Eugene's Band Omagh	Purchasing Musical Instruments	£5,000.00	Musical Instruments	Lottery	Capital

Constituency	Year	Organisation	Project Title	Award	Programme	Fund	Capital / revenue
West Tyrone		Tullywhisker Pipe Band	Purchasing Musical Instruments	£5,000.00	Musical Instruments	Lottery	Capital
		Saint Patrick's Pipe Band, Drumquin	Purchasing Musical Instruments	£4,901.00	Musical Instruments	Lottery	Capital
			Total 2007-2008	£14,901.00			
	2008-2009	Cappagh Pipe Band	Purchase of Musical Instruments	£5,000.00	Musical Instruments	Exchequer	Capital
		Mullinagoagh Pipe Band	Purchase Musical Instruments	£4,999.00	Musical Instruments	Exchequer	Capital
		Pride of the Derg Flute Band	Purchase of musical instruments	£4,713.00	Musical Instruments	Exchequer	Capital
		Dun Uladh Ltd	Dun Uladh Traditional Arts Programme	£22,350.00	Lottery - Project Funding	Lottery	Capital
		Trillick Pipe Band	Small grant funding	£3,650.00	Awards for All	Lottery	Revenue
			Total 2008-2009	£40,712.00			
	2009-2010	Ryan O'Donnell	Purchase of Musical Equipment	£1,945.00	SIAP	Lottery	Revenue

Constituency	Year	Organisation	Project Title	Award	Programme	Fund	Capital / revenue
West Tyrone		Dun Uladh Ltd	'Our Culture, Our Heritage', Traditional Arts Cultural Programme	£29,240.00	Lottery - Project Funding	Lottery	Revenue
		Omagh Protestant Boys (Melody) Flute Band	Purchase of Musical Instruments	£5,000.00	Musical Instruments	Lottery	Capital
			Total 2009-2010	£36,185.00			
			All Constituencies Total 2007-2008	£626,809.00			
			All Constituencies Total 2008-2009	£631,841.00			
			All Constituencies Total 2009-2010	£582,019.00			
			Overall Total 2007 - 2010	£1,840,669.00			

Ulster-Scots Agency

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 3209/10, whether his Department is satisfied with the geographical spread of the finance provided by the Ulster-Scots Agency; and what steps are being taken to increase the monies being distributed to counties in the West and South West of Ulster.

(AQW 5550/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The majority of funding applications received by the Ulster-Scots Agency are from groups and organisations located in counties Antrim and Down, the main areas where the Ulster-Scots population is concentrated.

However, the Agency has identified demand in the West and South West of Ulster and hopes to appoint an additional Development Officer to deliver the Agency's business in county Fermanagh and counties Cavan and Monaghan in the Irish Republic.

It is anticipated that the appointment of this officer will help to generate further interest in activities of the Agency which may in turn result in further funds being allocated in these areas.

Projects to Celebrate St Patrick's Day

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what projects his Department has assisted to celebrate St Patrick's Day 2010.

(AQW 5571/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: My Department provides funding to district councils through the Community Festivals Fund (CFF) and I understand that a number of councils support St Patrick's Day events through this fund.

Furthermore, DCAL through the work of its associated arm's length bodies has provided assistance to a number of projects to celebrate St Patrick's Day. For example:

- The Ulster-Scots Agency is supporting two projects to celebrate St Patrick's Day: a St Patrick's Night Ulster-Scots Gospel Concert in Markethill and an Ulster-Scots St Patrick's festival in Bushmills;
- National Museums Northern Ireland is hosting special events for St Patrick's Day at the Ulster Folk & Transport Museum, the Ulster American Folk Park and the Armagh County Museum; and
- The North-West Carnival Initiative has received lottery project funding through the Arts Council of Northern Ireland for programming which includes a St Patrick's Day event.

Irish Football Association

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what discussions he has had with the Irish Football Association to ensure that people who represent Northern Ireland at school-boy and under 21 levels cannot opt to represent another country.

(AQW 5746/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The rules governing football player eligibility in Northern Ireland are a matter for the world governing body of football, FIFA, and the Irish Football Association (IFA), the governing body of football in Northern Ireland. I can confirm that the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure has had discussions in the past with both the IFA and FIFA about football's eligibility rules as they affect Northern Ireland. It has been made clear by successive devolved Sports Ministers that they fully support the principle of sports governing bodies doing everything possible to encourage young talented players from Northern Ireland to go on to represent their country at international level. I understand the IFA has recently decided to take this matter to the Court of Arbitration for Sport in Switzerland and I support their efforts in this regard.

Ulster Scots: Funding

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how the £5m funding for Ulster Scots announced after the Hillsborough Agreement will be distributed.

(AQW 5767/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The Prime Minister recently decided to provide £5m funding over five years for an Ulster-Scots Broadcast Fund for Culture and Language.

I am meeting with the Minister of State for Northern Ireland to discuss the details for the delivery of this Fund, but I would anticipate that, in line with the existing Irish-Language Broadcasting Fund, it will be administered by Northern Ireland Screen.

Irish and Local Studies Library in Armagh

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure if there are any plans to reduce the opening hours of the Irish and Local Studies Library in Armagh.

(AQW 5770/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Libraries NI currently have no plans to reduce the opening hours of the Irish and Local Studies Library in Armagh.

The opening hours of the library, in the longer term, will be considered as part of an overall review of heritage services which Libraries NI will undertake shortly.

Department of Education

Departmental Posts: Relocation and Decentralisation

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of Education what consideration she has given to posts within her Department that could be relocated or decentralised.

(AQW 5294/10)

Minister of Education (Ms C Ruane): Creidim go bhfuil sé riachtanach go bhfuil dílárú laistigh dár sochaí ag gach leibhéal. Mhaígh mé sa Tionól go gcloífinn le dualgais chomhionannais faoin ARP i dtaca le dílárú.

I believe it is essential that there is decentralisation within our society at all levels. I stated in the Assembly that under RPA I would adhere to equality duties in relation to decentralisation.

Funding for Preparatory Departments

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Education whether her Department's proposal to withdraw funding from the preparatory departments of grammar schools, from September 2010, has been assessed against Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

(AQW 5303/10)

Minister of Education: D'aibhsigh an tAthbhreithniú Neamhspleách Straitéiseach ar Oideachas (ar a dtugtar Tuairisc Bain), a foilsíodh i mí na Nollag sa bhliain 2006, roimh theacht isteach san oifig dom, saincheist an mhaoinithe do ranna ullmhúcháin. Maidir le leithdháileadh an bhuiséid oideachais, mhaígh an tuairisc:

The Independent Strategic Review of Education (known as the Bain Report), published in December 2006, prior to me coming into office, highlighted the issue of the funding of preparatory departments. In respect of the distribution of the education budget, the Report 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 in its 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. 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”.

In light of the Bain recommendation, my Department commissioned the Business Consultancy Service of the Department of Finance and Personnel in January 2009 to independently undertake a review of this funding and to provide a report of their findings. Their Report, which was provided to me in September 2009, concluded that the Department should consider the withdrawal of funding to preparatory departments on the basis of equality of access.

However, before reaching a decision on this recommendation, I asked for an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) should be carried out under Section 75 of the 1998 Northern Ireland Act. The EQIA consultation closed on 4 March 2010 and I will give conscientious consideration to the responses received to this consultation prior to making my decision.

Funding for Preparatory Departments

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Education what Equality Impact Assessment was carried out in relation to her Department’s proposal to withdraw funding from the preparatory departments of grammar schools, from September 2010.

(AQW 5305/10)

Minister of Education: D’aibhsigh an tAthbhreithniú Neamhspleách Straitéiseach ar Oideachas (ar a dtugtar Tuairisc Bain), a foilsíodh i mí na Nollag sa bhliain 2006, roimh theacht isteach san oifig dom, saincheist an mhaoinithe do ranna ullmhúcháin. Maidir le leithdháileadh an bhuiséid oideachais, mhaígh an tuairisc:

The Independent Strategic Review of Education (known as the Bain Report), published in December 2006, prior to me coming into office, highlighted the issue of the funding of preparatory departments. In respect of the distribution of the education budget, the Report 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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However, before reaching a decision on this recommendation, I asked for an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) should be carried out under Section 75 of the 1998 Northern Ireland Act. The EQIA consultation closed on 4 March 2010 and I will give conscientious consideration to the responses received to this consultation prior to making my decision.

Funding for Preparatory Departments

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Education to detail the rationale for her Department’s proposal to withdraw funding from the preparatory departments of grammar schools, from September 2010.
(AQW 5307/10)

Minister of Education: D’aibhsigh an tAthbheithniú Neamhspleách Straitéiseach ar Oideachas (ar a dtugtar Tuairisc Bain), a foilsíodh i mí na Nollag sa bhliain 2006, roimh theacht isteach san oifig dom, saincheist an mhaoinithe do ranna ullmhúcháin. Maidir le leithdháileadh an bhuiséid oideachais, mhaígh an tuairisc:

The Independent Strategic Review of Education (known as the Bain Report), published in December 2006, prior to me coming into office, highlighted the issue of the funding of preparatory departments. In respect of the distribution of the education budget, the Report 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 in its 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. 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”.

In light of the Bain recommendation, my Department commissioned the Business Consultancy Service of the Department of Finance and Personnel in January 2009 to independently undertake a

review of this funding and to provide a report of their findings. Their Report, which was provided to me in September 2009, concluded that the Department should consider the withdrawal of funding to preparatory departments on the basis of equality of access.

However, before reaching a decision on this recommendation, I asked for an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) should be carried out under Section 75 of the 1998 Northern Ireland Act. The EQIA consultation closed on 4 March 2010 and I will give conscientious consideration to the responses received to this consultation prior to making my decision.

Per Capita Spend on Schools

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Education how much her Department has spent, per capita, on (i) Irish-medium primary schools; (ii) preparatory departments of grammar schools; (iii) controlled primary schools; and (iv) maintained primary schools, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 5359/10)

Minister of Education: Is í an bhliain airgeadais dheireanach iomlán dona bhfuil na sonraí seo ar fáil ná an bhliain 2008/09. Tá an méid caiteachais athfhilltigh tharmligthe agus neamhtharmligthe per capita i ngach bliain de na 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 per capita delegated and non-delegated recurrent expenditure for each of the financial years 2006/07, 2007/08 and 2008/09 is shown in the table below.

	Delegated and Non-Delegated Expenditure Per Capita (£)		
	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Irish-Medium Primary Schools	3,306	3,575	3,950
Controlled Primary Schools	3,046	3,288	3,577
Maintained Primary Schools	3,036	3,261	3,458
Preparatory Department of Grammar	816	871	902

Footnotes:

- (i) Expenditure 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 expenditure of the Unit from the host school.
- (ii) Expenditure information in relation to the preparatory departments attached to three Controlled Grammar Schools has not been included as the SEELB has advised that it is not possible to disaggregate the expenditure of the preparatory departments from the host grammar schools. The number of pupils attending these three preparatory departments has not therefore been included in the per capita calculations for the three years listed in table above.

Northern Ireland Commission for Catholic Education and the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools

Mr M Storey asked the Minister of Education how many meetings she or her officials have had with (i) the Northern Ireland Commission for Catholic Education; and (ii) the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools in the last 12 months, listed by date.

(AQW 5392/10)

Minister of Education: I and my adviser have had a number of meetings with these groups.

Thionóil m'fheidhmeannaigh 60 cruinniú le Comhairle na Scoileanna Caitliceacha faoi Chothabháil ar na dátaí atá liostaithe thíos:

My officials have also held 60 meetings with the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools on the dates listed below:

02 March 2009	11 May 2009	01 September 2009	09 December 2009
04 March 2009	20 May 2009	02 September 2009	16 December 2009
06 March 2009	20 May 2009	23 September 2009	11 January 2010
09 March 2009	21 May 2009	06 October 2009	14 January 2010
11 March 2009	01 June 2009	06 October 2009	26 January 2010
18 March 2009	17 June 2009	15 October 2009	01 February 2010
20 March 2009	17 June 2009	20 October 2009	03 February 2010
27 March 2009	25 June 2009	21 October 2009	03 February 2010
03 April 2009	08 July 2009	22 October 2009	09 February 2009
06 April 2009	29 July 2009	04 November 2009	17 February 2010
06 April 2009	06 August 2009	06 November 2009	23 February 2010
07 April 2009	11 August 2009	20 November 2009	24 February 2010
22 April 2009	17 August 2009	25 November 2009	25 February 2010
28 April 2009	26 August 2009	26 November 2009	26 February 2010
07 May 2009	27 August 2009	07 December 2009	02 March 2010

Capital Spend

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister of Education what is the planned capital spend on schools in the Strangford constituency for the 2010/11 financial year.

(AQW 5405/10)

Minister of Education: Construction work on a new school building for St Joseph's Primary School, Carryduff is currently underway and is due to complete in August 2010. This project was taken forward under the Public Private Partnership (PPP) with a capital cost to my Department's 2010/11 capital budget of £5.8m. The only other major capital project currently in planning for the Strangford constituency is the proposed new school building for Glasry College, Ballyhalbert.

Seans gurb eol duit gur choimisiúnaigh mé athbhreithniú ar gach tionscadal reatha atá fós á phleanáil i mí Dheireadh Fómhair sa bhliain 2009. Cuideoidh an t-athbhreithniú seo le cur chuige níos straitéisí a fhorbairt ar chinntí infheistiú caipitil agus ar bhainistíocht eastát na scoileanna. Sa timpeallacht gheilleagrach reatha, cinnteoidh an t-athbhreithniú go n-úsáidfear gach acmhainn atá ar fáil chun na torthaí is fearr do pháistí agus an luach is fearr don cháiníocóir a bhaint amach. Mar gheall air seo, tá sé tábhachtach go ndearbhaíonn muid go bhfuil gach tionscadal caipitil ina n-infheistíonn muid inmharthana san fhadtéarma.

You may be aware that in October 2009, I commissioned a review of all current projects still in planning. This 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.

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.

As the Department's capital budget has not yet been finalised, it is not possible at this stage to state how much will be spent on capital works in schools in the Strangford constituency in 2010/11.

Transfer 2010

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education if it is necessary for a grammar school, which is seeking to become a non-selective school in accordance with the guidance given in transfer 2010, to submit a development proposal to her Department.

(AQW 5437/10)

Minister of Education: Recent years have seen significant changes in the delivery of education to create a more child centred education service which is inclusive and diverse. This includes the introduction of specialist schools, the development of extended schools, the move towards a campus model including early years provision and health service, the development of collaborative arrangements in Area Learning Communities and the new admissions arrangements for transfer to post-primary school.

Is tábhachtach go spreagtar an móiminteam seo agus go dtugtar tacaíocht dó a oiread agus is féidir. Creidim gur chóir do phróisis mo Roinne athruithe a éascú i gcásanna inar mian le scoileanna na treoracha nua beartais a leanúint go hiomlán, lena n-áirítear díothú an roghnaithe acadúil. Chuige seo, beidh an Roinn ag athbhreithniú na treorach ar na himthosca a éilíonn foilsiú Thogra Forbartha lena chinntiú go bhfuil sé ábhartha agus nua-aimseartha i gcomhthéacs an bheartais reatha.

It is important that this momentum is encouraged and supported as much as possible. I believe where schools wish to fully embrace the new policy directions, including the removal of academic selection, that my Department's processes should facilitate the changes. To this end the Department will be reviewing the guidance on circumstances that require the publication of a development proposal to ensure it is relevant and up-to-date in the current policy context.

In the meantime, however, where a school brings forward a development proposal to implement the new admissions arrangements the Department will ensure it is processed expeditiously.

Preparatory Departments of Grammar Schools

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Education to detail any correspondence she has received, to date, opposing her proposal to withdraw funding from the preparatory departments of grammar schools.

(AQW 5458/10)

Minister of Education: Mar is eol duit, thug mo Roinn údarás do Sheirbhís Comhairleachta Gnó na Roinne Airgeadais agus Pearsanra, i mí Eanáir 2009, chun athbhreithniú a dhéanamh go neamhspleách ar mhaoiniú na ranna ullmhúcháin de bharr na moltaí i dTuirisc Bain, agus chun tuairisc a sholáthar ar na torthaí. Bhain an Tuairisc, a soláthraíodh dom i mí Mheán Fómhair 2009, de thátal as gur chóir don Roinn maoiniú na ranna ullmhúcháin a tharraingt siar mar gheall ar chomhionannas rochtana.

As you know my Department commissioned the Business Consultancy Service of the Department of Finance and Personnel, in January 2009, to independently undertake a review of the funding to preparatory departments following on from recommendations in the Bain Report and to provide a report of their findings. Their Report, which was provided to me in September 2009, concluded that the Department should consider the withdrawal of funding to preparatory departments on the basis of equality of access.

This recommendation was in line with the view of the Equality Commission, which stated in its document "Every Child an Equal Child" that a key component of a quality education system is the provision of equality of access to good education.

However, before reaching a decision on this recommendation, I asked for an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) to be carried out under Section 75 of the 1998 Northern Ireland Act. The EQIA consultation closed on 4 March 2010 and I will give conscientious consideration to the responses received to this consultation prior to making my decision.

To date, my Department has catalogued: 432 responses to the draft Equality Impact Assessment; 70 Ministerial Correspondence letters; 27 General Mail letters; 15 Departmental Web Mail letters; and 6 General Correspondence letters.

Education Advisory Forum

Mr M Storey asked the Minister of Education for an estimate of (i) the start up costs; and (ii) the running costs for the proposed Education Advisory Forum.

(AQW 5462/10)

Minister of Education: Meastar go bhfuil thart ar £100k ar na costais bhreise reatha, le haghaidh pleanáil buiséadach, in aghaidh na bliana. Táthar ag súil go n-íocfaidh acmhainní na Roinne as acmhainní foirne an Fhóraitm Chomhairligh Oideachais.

Additional running costs, for the purposes of budgetary planning, are estimated at circa £100k per annum. Staffing resources for the Educational Advisory Forum are expected to be met from within the Department's resources.

No estimates have been made of start-up costs which are expected to be notional.

Sectoral Support Bodies

Mr M Storey asked the Minister of Education for an estimate of (i) the start up costs; and (ii) the annual running costs for each of the proposed Sectoral Support Bodies.

(AQW 5465/10)

Minister of Education: Ní féidir costais dúisithe ar na comhlachtaí molta um thacaíocht earnála a mheas go cruinn faoi láthair. Tiocfaidh roinnt comhlachtaí um thacaíocht earnála i gcrích ó chomhlachtaí a fheidhmíonn laistigh de chomhlachtaí deontaschúnta oideachais faoi láthair, agus tosóidh na cinn eile ag obair ab initio. Beidh tionchar suntasach ag an bhunú seo ar chostas ar chomhlachtaí nua a lainseáil. Tá m'fheidhmeannaigh ag leanúint de bheith ag obair le hiarratasóirí ar mhaoiniú thacaíocht earnála chun na costais ar a bhfeidmiú a thosú agus a choinneáil a shainaithint.

At this stage it is not possible to estimate with accuracy the actual start up costs of the proposed sectoral support bodies. Some Sectoral Support Bodies will emerge from bodies that currently operate within existing grant-aided education bodies whilst others will begin work ab initio. This genesis will have a significant impact on the cost of launching new bodies. My officials are continuing to work with applicants for sectoral support funding to identify the costs of starting and maintaining their operation.

I anticipate that the aggregate annual running costs of all sectoral support bodies will be in the region of £2m.

Capital Spend on Schools in Upper Bann

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Education what is the planned capital spend on schools in the Upper Bann constituency for 2010/11.

(AQW 5492/10)

Minister of Education: There are currently 7 major capital projects in the Upper Bann constituency included in my Department's major capital programme. Construction work is currently underway on one these, Banbridge Academy, which is due to complete in late 2011. The remaining projects are all at various stages of the planning process.

Seans gurb eol duit gur choimisiúnaigh mé athbhreithniú ar gach tionscadal reatha atá fós á phleanáil i mí Dheireadh Fómhair sa bhliain 2009. Cuideoidh an t-athbhreithniú seo le cur chuige níos straitéisí a fhorbairt ar chinntí infheistiú caipitil agus ar bhainistíocht eastát na scoileanna. Sa timpeallacht gheilleagrach reatha, cinnteoidh an t-athbhreithniú go n-úsáidfear gach acmhainn atá ar fáil chun na torthaí is fearr do pháistí agus an luach is fearr don cháinócóir a bhaint amach. Mar gheall air seo, tá sé tábhachtach go ndearbhaíonn muid go bhfuil gach tionscadal caipitil ina n-infheistíonn muid inmharthana san fhadtéarma.

You may be aware that in October 2009, I commissioned a review of all current projects still in planning. This 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.

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.

As the Department's capital budget has not yet been finalised, it is not possible at this stage to state how much will be spent on capital works in schools in the Upper Bann constituency in 2010/11

Pupils Enrolled in Primary Schools in the Southern Education and Library Board Area.

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister of Education how many pupils are currently enrolled in each class in primary schools in the Southern Education and Library Board area.

(AQW 5581/10)

Minister of Education: Tá sé socraithe agam go gcuirfear an t-eolas a iarradh i Leabharlann an Tionóil.

I have arranged for the information requested to be placed in the Assembly library.

Post-primary Education Planning in the Lurgan and Portadown Areas

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister of Education to detail all correspondence between her Department and the Southern Education and Library Board in relation to post-primary education planning in the Lurgan and Portadown areas, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 5583/10)

Minister of Education: Mar gheall ar an teagmháil mhinic idir feidhmeannaigh mo Roinne agus a gcomhghleacaithe i mBord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an Deiscirt (BOLD), ní féidir gach comhfhreagrais a mhionsonrú. Le linn na tréimhse de thrí bliana a chuaigh thart, áfach, bhí mórán malartuithe comhfhreagrais idir an Roinn agus BOLD, go háirithe ar ghnéithe de phróiseas an Bhreithmheasa Eacnamaíochta le haghaidh na scéimeanna molta do Lurgan College agus do Portadown College. Ina theannta sin, chomhfhreagair an Roinn ar 21 Eanáir sa bhliain 2010 ar sholáthar páirce ar Lurgan Junior High School.

Given the frequent contact between my Department officials and their counterparts in the Southern Education and Library Board (SELB) it is not possible to detail all correspondence. However, over the recent three year period there has been a considerable exchange of correspondence between the Department and the SELB specific to aspects of the economic appraisal process for the proposed capital schemes for both Lurgan College and Portadown College. In addition the Department corresponded on 21 January 2010 about pitch provision at Lurgan Junior High School.

School Building Projects

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister of Education to list the school building projects which (i) have been completed; (ii) are currently in progress; and (iii) are at the planning stage in the (a) Lurgan; (b) Portadown; and (c) Banbridge areas, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 5584/10)

Minister of Education: In the last three years two major capital school projects have been completed in the Lurgan, Portadown and Banbridge areas. The projects are as follows:-

School	Project Details	Completion Date
Maralin P.S. Craigavon	New school	April 2008
Waringstown P.S.	Extension & Refurbishment	October 2008

Banbridge Academy is currently in the process of being extended/refurbished.

The following six major capital school projects in the Lurgan, Portadown and Banbridge areas are currently at various stages in the planning process:-

School	Project Details
Tannaghmore P.S. Lurgan	New school on existing site
St Teresa's P.S. Lurgan	New school on extended site
St Mary's P.S. Banbridge	New school on extended site
St Patrick's College Banbridge	New school on extended site
Portadown College	New school on existing site
Lurgan College	New school on existing site

Seans gurb eol duit gur choimisiúnaigh mé athbhreithniú ar gach tionscadal reatha atá fós á phleanáil i mí Dheireadh Fómhair sa bhliain 2009. Cuideoidh an t-athbhreithniú seo le cur chuige níos straitéisí a fhorbairt ar chinntí infheistiú caipitil agus ar bhainistíocht eastát na scoileanna. Sa timpeallacht gheilleagrach reatha, cinnteoidh an t-athbhreithniú go n-úsáidfear gach acmhainn atá ar fáil chun na torthaí is fearr do pháistí agus an luach is fearr don cháiníocóir a bhaint amach. Mar gheall air seo, tá sé tábhachtach go ndearbhaíonn muid go bhfuil gach tionscadal caipitil ina n-infheistíonn muid inmharthana san fhadtéarma.

You may be aware that in October 2009, I commissioned a review of all current projects still in planning. This 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.

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.

Post-primary Schools in the Lurgan and Portadown Areas

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister of Education to detail all correspondence between her Department and the Southern Education and Library Board in relation to curriculum entitlement in post-primary schools in the Lurgan and Portadown areas, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 5585/10)

Minister of Education: Bhí teagmháil agus comhfhreagras rialta idir oifigigh mo Roinne agus a macasamhla ar an BOLD i dtaca leis an Chreat Teidlíochta (CT) i gceantar na Lorgan/ Phort an Dúnáin agus ní bheadh sé indéanta gach teagmháil eatarthu a mhionsonrú.

There has been very regular contact and correspondence between my Departmental officials and their counterparts in the SELB in relation to the Entitlement Framework (EF) in the Lurgan/Portadown area and it would simply not be possible to detail every single contact.

As with the work we do across the north, the focus of contact with the SELB has been to ensure that schools in this area are supported and facilitated in widening the range and balance of courses available to the young people they serve in preparation for full implementation of the Entitlement Framework from 2013. It is clear that more needs to be done to ensure that young people in the wider Craigavon/Lurgan/Portadown area can access a sufficiently wide range of courses and pathways and my Department has asked SELB to look again at the planning of post-14 education provision in the area and to set out clearly how its plans will contribute to the delivery of high-quality, sustainable provision for all young people.

Sports Complex for Malone Integrated College

Ms A Lo asked the Minister of Education for an update on the proposed new purpose-built sports complex for Malone Integrated College.

(AQW 5597/10)

Minister of Education: The major capital scheme for the proposed sports hall provision at Malone College is at planning stage D and final sketch plans are currently with my Department's technical advisers for consideration.

Tá an scéim seo cuimsithe san athbhreithniú ar thionscadail chaipitil a choimisiúnaigh mé san fhómhar. Cuideoidh torthaí an athbhreithnithe seo le cur chuige níos straitéisí a fhorbairt ar infheistiú caipitil agus ar bhainistíocht eastát na scoileanna, agus cinntídh siad an bealach chun tosaigh do gach scéim, lena n-áirítear an scéim do Malone College.

This scheme is also included in the review of capital projects which I commissioned in the Autumn. The out-workings of this review will inform a more strategic approach to capital investment and management of the schools estate and will determine the way forward for all schemes, including the one for Malone College.

Attacks on Teaching Staff

Mr T Lunn asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 4829/10, how many pupils were suspended for physical attacks on teaching staff in 2008/09, broken down by Education and Library Board area.

(AQW 5599/10)

Minister of Education: Bailíonn an Roinn staitisticí ar fhionraíochtaí, lena n-áirítear na cúiseanna a bhí ar na fionraíochtaí, ó gach Bord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne ar bhonn bliantúil. Cé go mbailítear an t-eolas ar fhionraíochtaí mar gheall ar ionsaí fisiceach, ní dhéantar aon idirdhealú ar ionsaithe fisiceacha ar fhoireann mhúinteoireachta agus ionsaithe fisiceacha ar fhoireann neamh-mhúinteoireachta.

The Department collects statistics on suspensions, including reasons for them, from each of the Education and Library Boards annually. Whilst information is collected on suspensions as a result of

physical attack on staff, there is no differentiation made between physical attacks on teaching staff and non-teaching staff.

The number of pupils suspended for a physical attack on staff in 2008/09, broken down by Education and Library Board area is shown in the table below.

Education and Library Board Area	Number of pupils suspended
BELB	38
NEELB	35
SEELB	43
SELB	26
WELB	49
Total	191

Notes:

1. The figures are based on pupils undertaking Key Stage 1-4 in primary, post-primary and special schools.
2. The ELB is that in which the school is located.
3. The figures refer to the number of pupils suspended. The number of suspensions for physical attack on staff is likely to be higher since a pupil can be suspended more than once for the same reason.

It is not possible to provide a breakdown of the type of physical assault on staff for which pupils were suspended as neither the Department nor the Education and Library Boards collect this information.

Attacks on Teaching Staff

Mr T Lunn asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 4829/10, to provide a breakdown of the type of physical assault on teaching staff for which pupils were suspended in 2008/09.

(AQW 5600/10)

Minister of Education: Bailíonn an Roinn staitisticí ar fhionraíochtaí, lena n-áirítear na cúiseanna a bhí ar na fionraíochtaí, ó gach Bord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne ar bhonn bliantúil. Cé go mbailítear an t-eolas ar fhionraíochtaí mar gheall ar ionsaí fisiceach, ní dhéantar aon idirdhealú ar ionsaithe fisiceacha ar fhoireann mhúinteoireachta agus ionsaithe fisiceacha ar fhoireann neamh-mhúinteoireachta.

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It is not possible to provide a breakdown of the type of physical assault on staff for which pupils were suspended as neither the Department nor the Education and Library Boards collect this information.

Attacks on Teaching Staff

Mr T Lunn asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 4829/10, whether any teachers took sick leave as a result of a physical attack in 2008/09.

(AQW 5601/10)

Minister of Education: The Department of Education does not hold this information.

Thug Príomhfheidhmeannaigh ar na 5 Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne agus ar Chomhairle na Scoileanna Caitliceacha faoi Chothabháil comhairle dom nach gcoinnfóinn siad an t-eolas a chumasóidh iad chun múinteoirí a ghlac saoire bhreitheachta mar gheall ar ionsaí fisiceach a shainaithint.

I have been advised by the Chief Executives of the 5 Education and Library Boards and the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools that they do not hold information that would allow them to identify any teachers who took sick leave as a result of a physical attack.

Controlled Primary Schools

Lord Browne asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the number of controlled primary schools in 2007/08; (ii) the total number of children enrolled in these schools; and (iii) the total recurrent funding that controlled primary schools received in 2008/09.

(AQW 5608/10)

Minister of Education: The information provided below provides details of the number of schools, the number of funded full-time equivalent pupils (FTEs), and overall expenditure for both 2007/08 and 2008/09 for controlled primary schools.

CONTROLLED PRIMARY SCHOOLS ⁽¹⁾

Financial Year	Number of schools	Number of funded FTE pupils	Total Delegated & Non-Delegated Expenditure £000's
2007/08	426	80,096	£ 263,344
2008/09	417	78,356	£ 280,259

Note (1) Controlled schools includes controlled integrated primary schools; one controlled Irish-medium school; and nursery classes where appropriate.

Data source: Education & Library Boards Outturn expenditure 2007/08 & 2008/09

Faigheann scoileanna maoiniú ar bhonn bliana airgeadais in ionad ar bhonn bliain acadúil. Baintear úsáid as líon na ndaltaí atá rollaithe i ngach scoil nuair a dhéantar an daonáireamh bliantúil scoile (Deireadh Fómhair) chun leithdháiltí maoinithe a chinneadh don chéad bhliain airgeadais eile.

Schools receive funding on a financial year rather than an academic year basis. The number of pupils enrolled in each school at the time of the annual school census (October) is used in determining funding distributions for the next financial year.

Capital Budgets

Lord Browne asked the Minister of Education to detail the amount her Department has contributed to the capital budgets of (i) controlled primary schools; (ii) Catholic maintained primary schools; and (iii) Irish- medium primary schools, in each of the last ten years.

(AQW 5609/10)

Minister of Education: Níl an t-eolas a iarradh furasta teacht air agus ní fhéadfaí é a fháil ach ar chostas díréireach.

Information in the format requested is not readily available and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Alternative Education Provision Review

Ms J McCann asked the Minister of Education when the Alternative Education Provision review will be issued for consultation.

(AQW 5610/10)

Minister of Education: The report on the review of alternative education provision and proposals for change will be published for public consultation in the autumn.

Draft proposals on the way forward for alternative education provision presumed that the Education and Skills Authority (ESA) would be established by 1 January 2010. The proposals must, therefore, be re-visited to take account of the Convergence Delivery Plan, published in February, which details how services will be maintained within existing organisations whilst moving towards a regionally managed model which should deliver consistency in provision and greater value for money.

Further work which will contribute directly to the proposals is in hand. A report of a consultation with young people in alternative education provision, to learn what could have been done better to keep them in school and to hear what they think about alternative education, is being finalised. Their views are important in shaping future provision and will be fed into the consultation paper.

The Education and Library Boards' Regional Social, Emotional and Behaviour Difficulty (SEBD) Group is engaged in developing common referral procedures for behaviour support, including those for placement in alternative education provision, in advance of our consultation on proposals for the future model.

Níos déanaí, rinne an Roinn suirbhé ar líne ar iompar daltaí i mbunscoileanna, i scoileanna speisialta agus in iarbhunscoileanna. Thug an Chigireacht Oideachais agus Oiliúna (COO) cuairteanna leantacha le linn mhí an Mhárta chun iniúchadh cuimsitheach a dhéanamh ar shaincheisteanna a bhaineann le hiompar daltaí agus leis an tacaíocht atá ar fáil do scoileanna le dul i ngleic le daltaí dúshlánacha. Tá sé ceaptha go bhfoilseofar an tsuirbhé iomlán roimh lár na bliana 2010.

More recently, the Department has undertaken an online survey of pupil behaviour in primary, special and post-primary schools. Follow-up visits to a sample of schools were undertaken by the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) during March to explore in-depth issues around pupil behaviour and the support available to schools in dealing with challenging pupils. It is intended that a report of the entire survey will be published by mid 2010.

Youth Service Provision in North Down

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the budget for youth service provision in the North Down constituency for 2010/11; and (ii) if any services or projects will no longer be funded.

(AQW 5619/10)

Minister of Education: Soláthraíonn an Roinn Oideachais maoiniú do na Boird Oideachais agus Leabharlainne (BOLanna) le haghaidh soláthar seirbhísí don ógra ina gceantair. Tá na BOLanna freagrach as a mbuiséid a leithdháileadh, agus iad ag cur san áireamh go riartar acmhainní ar bhonn cothrom agus go bhfuil siad bunaithe ar mheasúnú 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 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 South Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB) who has responsibility for youth service provision in the North Down constituency area has advised that the SEELB 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.

Capital Spend in Schools in the North Down Constituency

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Education what is the planned capital spend in schools in the North Down constituency for 2010/11.

(AQW 5620/10)

Minister of Education: There are currently three major capital projects in the North Down constituency included in my Department's major capital programme all of which are at various stages of the planning process.

Seans gurb eol duit gur choimisiúnaigh mé athbhreithniú ar gach tionscadal reatha atá fós á phleanáil i mí Dheireadh Fómhair sa bhliain 2009. Cuideoidh an t-athbhreithniú seo le cur chuige níos straitéisí a fhorbairt ar chinntí infheistiú caipitil agus ar bhainistíocht eastát na scoileanna. Sa timpeallacht gheilleagrach reatha, cinnteoidh an t-athbhreithniú go n-úsáidfear gach acmhainn atá ar fáil chun na torthaí is fearr do pháistí agus an luach is fearr don cháiníocóir a bhaint amach. Mar gheall air seo, tá sé tábhachtach go ndearbhaíonn muid go bhfuil gach tionscadal caipitil ina n-infheistíonn muid inmharthana san fhadtéarma.

You may be aware that in October 2009, I commissioned a review of all current projects still in planning. This 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.

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.

As the Department's capital budget has not yet been finalised, it is not possible at this stage to state how much will be spent on capital works in schools in the North Down constituency in 2010/11.

Review of Capital Spend

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Education when she intends to make a statement on her review of capital spend in her Department.

(AQW 5625/10)

Minister of Education: Cuideoidh an t-athbhreithniú caipitil le cur chuige níos straitéisí a fhorbairt ar chinntí infheistithe caipitil agus ar bhainistíocht eastát na scoileanna. Sa timpeallacht gheilleagrach reatha, cinnteoidh an t-athbhreithniú go n-úsáidfear gach acmhainn atá ar fáil chun na torthaí is fearr do pháistí agus an luach is fearr don cháiníocóir a bhaint amach. Mar gheall air seo, tá sé tábhachtach go ndearbhaíonn muid go bhfuil gach tionscadal caipitil ina n-infheistíonn muid inmharthana san fhadtearma.

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 take time to validate that the capital projects in which we invest are viable in the long term

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.

My officials are working to complete the process, as quickly as possible. Given the importance of this task, however, it is essential that robust evidence is collated and that full consideration is given to each project, before a decision is taken. I expect to be in a position to make an announcement in the near future.

Appointment of Governors

Mr D Kennedy asked the Minister of Education to outline the reasons for the delay in her Department appointing governors.

(AQW 5628/10)

Minister of Education: School Boards of Governors are reconstituted every four years. Reconstitution involves a number of stages and therefore can take some time to complete. The stages can include the following: advertisement and recruitment processes for governors; the election of teacher and parent representatives by schools; consultation where required with bodies entitled to nominate, including ELBs, Trustees and the department; election of Transferor representatives from contributory primary schools in the case of controlled post-primary schools; and vetting of all new governors before formal appointment.

Cé go bhfuil roinnt gobharnóirí le ceapadh go fóill, is féidir cruinnithe na mBord Gobharnóirí a thionól agus is féidir gnó a dhéanamh, a fhad is atá na cruinnithe le córam agus a fhad is a scagadh aon ghobharnóirí nua.

While some governors remain to be appointed, meetings of Boards of Governors can take place and business conducted, provided their meetings are quorate and any new governors have been vetted.

Capital Building Projects

Ms C Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Education to list (i) the capital building projects which have been completed since May 2007 in the North Belfast constituency; (ii) those currently underway; and (iii) those which are at the planning stage.

(AQW 5635/10)

Minister of Education: Since May 2007 one major capital school project has been completed in the North Belfast constituency. The project is as follows:-

School	Project Details	Capital Cost £m	Completion Date
Cedar Lodge Special School, Belfast	New school	4.54	August 2007

There are two major capital projects where construction work is currently underway. These are:-

School	Project Details	Estimated Capital Cost £m
Belfast Boys Model	New school on existing site	32.7
Belfast Model School for Girls	New school on existing site	30.1

The following four major capital school projects in the North Belfast constituency are currently at various stages of the planning process:-

School	Project Details	Estimated Capital Cost £m
Little Flower Girls S.S. Belfast	New school on existing site	8.96
Whitehouse P.S. Newtownabbey	New school on existing site	4.3
Edenderry Nursery School, Belfast	New school on new site	0.97
Glenwood P.S. Belfast	New school on existing site	10.37

The Economic Appraisal (EA) for Bunscoil Bheann Mhadagain has not yet been approved but it is anticipated that this will be completed shortly. Further progress on the project is subject to approval to the EA, the outcomes of the ongoing review of capital projects and the availability of funding for future projects.

Seans gurb eol duit gur choimisiúnaigh mé athbhreithniú ar gach tionscadal reatha atá fós á phleanáil i mí Dheireadh Fómhair sa bhliain 2009. Cuideoidh an t-athbhreithniú seo le cur chuige níos straitéisí a fhorbairt ar chinntí infheistiú caipitil agus ar bhainistíocht eastát na scoileanna. Sa timpeallacht gheilleagrach reatha, cinnteoidh an t-athbhreithniú go n-úsáidfear gach acmhainn atá ar fáil chun na torthaí is fearr do pháistí agus an luach is fearr don cháiníocóir a bhaint amach. Mar gheall air seo, tá sé tábhachtach go ndearbhaíonn muid go bhfuil gach tionscadal caipitil ina n-infheistíonn muid inmharthana san fhadtéarma.

You may be aware that in October 2009, I commissioned a review of all current projects still in planning. This 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.

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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.

Newbuild Schools in Lagan Valley

Mr J Craig asked the Minister of Education to detail the programme for newbuild schools in the Lagan Valley constituency for (i) 2010/11; (ii) 2011/12; and (iii) 2012/13.

(AQW 5653/10)

Minister of Education: There are currently two major capital projects in the Lagan Valley constituency included in my Department's major capital programme both of which are at various stages of the planning process. The projects are as follows:-

School	Project Details
St Colman's Primary School, Lambeg	New school on extended site
Dromore Central Primary School	New school on new site

Seans gurb eol duit gur choimisiúnaigh mé athbhreithniú ar gach tionscadal reatha atá fós á phleanáil i mí Dheireadh Fómhair sa bhliain 2009. Cuideoidh an t-athbhreithniú seo le cur chuige níos straitéisí a fhorbairt ar chinntí infheistiú caipitil agus ar bhainistíocht eastát na scoileanna. Sa timpeallacht gheilleagrach reatha, cinnteoidh an t-athbhreithniú go n-úsáidfear gach acmhainn atá ar fáil chun na torthaí is fearr do pháistí agus an luach is fearr don cháiníocóir a bhaint amach. Mar gheall air seo, tá sé tábhachtach go ndearbhaíonn muid go bhfuil gach tionscadal caipitil ina n-infheistíonn muid inmharthana san fhadtéarma.

You may be aware that in October 2009, I commissioned a review of all current projects still in planning. This 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.

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.

Capital Building Projects

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of Education to list (i) the capital building projects which have been completed since May 2007 in the North Antrim constituency; (ii) those currently underway; and (iii) those which are at the planning stage.

(AQW 5664/10)

Minister of Education: Since May 2007 four major capital school projects have been completed in the North Antrim constituency. The projects are as follows:-

School	Project Details	Capital Cost £m	Completion Date
St Brigid's P.S. Ballymena	New school	1.96	August 2007
St Colmcille's P.S. Ballymena	New school	2.62	August 2007
Fourtowns P.S. Ahoghill	New school	2.34	January 2008
Moorfields P.S. Ballymena	New school	2.07	December 2008

There are two major capital projects where construction work is currently underway. These are:-

School	Project Details	Estimated Capital Cost £m
St Mary's P.S. Portglenone	New school on extended site	3.9

School	Project Details	Estimated Capital Cost £m
St Patrick's & St Brigid's P.S. Ballycastle	New school on existing site	3.9

One further major capital project in the North Antrim constituency is included in my Department's major capital programme, namely a new school building for Ballymoney H.S. This project is currently in the early stages of the planning process.

Seans gurb eol duit gur choimisiúnaigh mé athbhreithniú ar gach tionscadal reatha atá fós á phleanáil i mí Dheireadh Fómhair sa bhliain 2009. Cuideoidh an t-athbhreithniú seo le cur chuige níos straitéisí a fhorbairt ar chinntí infheistiú caipitil agus ar bhainistíocht eastát na scoileanna. Sa timpeallacht gheilleagrach reatha, cinnteoidh an t-athbhreithniú go n-úsáidfear gach acmhainn atá ar fáil chun na torthaí is fearr do pháistí agus an luach is fearr don cháiníocóir a bhaint amach. Mar gheall air seo, tá sé tábhachtach go ndearbhaíonn muid go bhfuil gach tionscadal caipitil ina n-infheistíonn muid inmharthana san fhadtéarma.

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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.

Early Years Strategy

Mrs M Bradley asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQO 631/10, whether she can confirm a date for the publication of the Early Years Strategy.

(AQW 5692/10)

Minister of Education: Creidim go bhfuil sé ceart go bhfuil mo Roinn ag glacadh an ama chun cíoradh a dhéanamh ar an lear mór saincheistanna a bhaineann le Straitéis a fhorbairt a bhainfidh riachtanais na bpáistí amach sna cúig bliana atá le teacht agus ina ndiaidh. Tuigim go bhfuiltear ag súil le foilsiú níos luaithe in ionad níos moille agus, le hé seo a choinneáil i gcuimhne, tá sé ar intinn agam an Straitéis a fhoilsiú le haghaidh comhairlithe sa gharthodhchaf.

I believe it is right that my Department is taking the time to consider the very many issues involved in order to produce a Strategy that will meet the needs of children in the next five years and beyond. I understand the expectations of many for publication sooner rather than later, and with this in mind, I intend to publish the Strategy for consultation in the near future.

Cost of Children in Preparatory Schools Transferring to Primary Schools

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Education for an estimate of the annual cost to her Department to fund all children currently in preparatory schools transferring to primary schools.

(AQW 5696/10)

Minister of Education: Mar is eol duit, thug mo Roinn údarás do Sheirbhís Comhairleachta Gnó na Roinne Airgeadais agus Pearsanra, i mí Eanáir 2009, chun athbhreithniú a dhéanamh go neamhspleách

ar mhaoiniú na ranna ullmhúcháin de bharr na moltaí i dTuirisc Bain, agus chun tuairisc a sholáthar ar na torthaí. Bhain an Tuairisc, a soláthraíodh dom i mí Mheán Fómhair 2009, de tháthas gur chóir don Roinn maoiniú na ranna ullmhúcháin a tharraingt siar mar gheall ar chomhionannas rochtana.

As you know my Department commissioned the Business Consultancy Service of the Department of Finance and Personnel, in January 2009, to independently undertake a review of the funding to preparatory departments following on from recommendations in the Bain Report and to provide a report of their findings. Their Report, which was provided to me in September 2009, concluded that the Department should consider the withdrawal of funding to preparatory departments on the basis of equality of access.

This recommendation was in line with the view of the Equality Commission, which stated in its document "Every Child an Equal Child" that a key component of a quality education system is the provision of equality of access to good education.

However, before reaching a decision on this recommendation, I asked for an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) to be carried out under Section 75 of the 1998 Northern Ireland Act. The EQIA consultation closed on 4 March 2010 and I will give conscientious consideration to the responses received to this consultation prior to making my decision.

It is not possible therefore to estimate how many children, if any, would transfer from preparatory schools to primary schools if this proposal is accepted. Nor is it possible to estimate the annual cost associated with any such transfers.

Meetings Held in Irish

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Education whether she has held any meetings in which she insisted on speaking only Irish.

(AQW 5697/10)

Minister of Education: I have never held any meetings in which I insisted on speaking only Irish.

Bhí mórán cruinnithe agam trí mheán na Gaeilge, agus bhí Oifigigh Ghaeilge i láthair ag roinnt acu. Tionóladh cruinnithe eile i bhformáid dhátheangach, inar aontaigh Gaeilgeoirí an cruinniú a thionól i mBéarla go príomha d'fhonn go mbeadh feidhmeannaigh ón Roinn in ann páirt a ghlacadh.

I have had many meetings through the medium of Irish, some with Irish-language Officers in attendance. Other meetings were in bilingual format, where the Irish speakers agreed to the meeting being mainly in English so that officials from the Department could take part.

Department's Capital Projects

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister of Education for an update on the review of her Department's capital projects; and when the review will be completed and published.

(AQW 5724/10)

Minister of Education: Tá an t-athbhreithniú caipitil ar siúl agus tá m'fheidhmeannaigh ag obair chun an próiseas a chríochnú, a ghaiste is féidir. Mar gheall ar thábhacht an táisc seo, áfach, tá sé ríthábhachtach go mbailítear fianaise láidir agus go dtugtar breithniú iomlán ar gach tionscadal, sula ndéanfar aon chinneadh. Tá mé ag súil le go mbeidh mé in ann fógra a dhéanamh sa ghar-thodhchaí.

The capital review is ongoing and my officials are working to complete the process, as quickly as possible. Given the importance of this task, however, it is essential that robust evidence is collated and that full consideration is given to each project, before a decision is taken. I expect to be in a position to make an announcement in the near future.

Woodburn Primary School, Carrickfergus

Mr R Beggs asked the Minister of Education for an update on the redevelopment of Woodburn Primary School, Carrickfergus, including the nature of the work currently taking place and when the newbuild is expected to be completed.

(AQW 5725/10)

Minister of Education: Tá an scéim mholta um móroibreacha caipitil le haghaidh Woodburn Primary School ag céim an Bhreithmheasa Eacnamaíochta (BE) faoi láthair. I mí an Mheithimh 2009, chuir mo Roinn in iúl don BOLOT gurbh éigean an BE don tionscadal a nuashonrú agus a athnuachan, i comhréir le treoir na Roinne Airgeadais agus Pearsanra. Níor cuireadh BE nuashonraithe faoi bhráid mo Roinne go fóill.

The proposed major capital works scheme for Woodburn Primary School is currently at Economic Appraisal (EA) stage. In June 2009, my Department informed the NEELB that, in line with the Department of Finance and Personnel's guidance, the EA for the project needed to be updated and refreshed. An updated EA has not been submitted to my Department at this time.

The NEELB has advised that it is currently carrying out minor works on the site adjacent to the school to provide a temporary car park for the school on an extended site.

I would also note that in the autumn of 2009, I announced a review of all proposed major capital work projects, including that for Woodburn Primary School.

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.

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 the review is currently ongoing and the project has not been announced for major capital works funding, I cannot at this time provide a timeframe for a newbuild to be completed.

Annual Pay Increase for Staff at the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations & Assessment

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education why staff at the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations & Assessment have not received their contractual annual pay increase since 1 April 2009; and when they can expect to receive this pay increase.

(AQW 5732/10)

Minister of Education: I expect the vast majority of CCEA staff will receive their 2009 pay increase shortly.

Éilíonn polasaí um pá don earnáil phoiblí cur chuige láidir ar mheasúnú gach cáis ghnó um pá, lena n-áirítear mionscrúdú an-chúramach lena chinntiú go bhfuil tograí pá i gcoibhneas le feidhmíocht ar aon dul leis an bheartas iomlán.

Public sector pay policy requires a robust approach to assessment of all pay business cases, including very careful scrutiny to ensure that performance related pay proposals align with the overall policy.

There remain some outstanding issues on pay business cases for CCEA that affect a small percentage of CCEA staff (around 9%), and work is continuing to resolve these. However, rather than holding up

payments for the vast majority of staff, the Department and CCEA have worked to separate the issues and the pay business case for 91% of CCEA staff has been completed and should receive final approval shortly.

I am working to ensure that the processing of the remainder of the CCEA pay business cases is brought to a speedy and satisfactory conclusion.

New Capital Build for Bangor Grammar School

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Education when she expects to announce a timescale for the new capital build for Bangor Grammar School.

(AQW 5733/10)

Minister of Education: You have asked several related questions in relation to the ongoing review of all projects in capital planning.

Firstly, I refer you to the answers I have given on the timescale for the Bangor Grammar School project in AQW 4637/10 and to AQO 928/10. The position remains unchanged.

In relation to the issue of community involvement in decisions on new capital builds; this issue is addressed within the context of an Economic Appraisal (EA) An EA is, as you will know, a prerequisite for every major capital scheme and agreeing the options to be included in the EA involves extensive engagement with the school and its community.

Tá riachtanais chóiríochta tábhachtach. Dírionn an t-athbhreithniú ar thioscadail chaipitil ar na scéimeanna sin atá cuimsithe i bPlean Sheachadadh Infheistithe na Roinne. Sainithníodh gach scoil atá cuimsithe sa phlean seo mar scoileanna nach bhfuil an chóiríocht acu a mbaineann na riachtanais reatha amach do scoileanna dá gcineál.

Accommodation requirements are important. The review of capital projects initially focuses on those schemes which are included in the Department's Investment Delivery Plan. All schools included in this plan have been identified as having accommodation that does not meet the current requirements for schools of their type

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, regardless of school type. All schemes currently under review are subject to consideration using robust and verifiable information to ensure their consistency with current policies including Every School a Good School, Revised Curriculum, Sustainable Schools, Irish-Medium Review and the Entitlement Framework.

New Capital Builds

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Education what weight will be given to community involvement in any decisions on new capital builds.

(AQW 5734/10)

Minister of Education: You have asked several related questions in relation to the ongoing review of all projects in capital planning.

Firstly, I refer you to the answers I have given on the timescale for the Bangor Grammar School project in AQW 4637/10 and to AQO 928/10. The position remains unchanged.

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Review of Capital Projects

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Education whether the current condition of a school's accommodation will be given consideration in her Department's review of capital projects.

(AQW 5736/10)

Minister of Education: You have asked several related questions in relation to the ongoing review of all projects in capital planning.

Firstly, I refer you to the answers I have given on the timescale for the Bangor Grammar School project in AQW 4637/10 and to AQO 928/10. The position remains unchanged.

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Tá riachtanais chóiríochta tábhachtach. Dírionn an t-athbhreithniú ar thioscadail chaipitil ar na scéimeanna sin atá cuimsithe i bPlean Sheachadadh Infheistithe na Roinne. Sainithníodh gach scoil atá cuimsithe sa phlean seo mar scoileanna nach bhfuil an chóiríocht acu a mbaineann na riachtanais reatha amach do scoileanna dá gcineál.

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Review of Capital Projects

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Education whether she can give an assurance that schools in the grammar sector in need of capital investment will not be disadvantaged by her Department's review of capital projects.

(AQW 5737/10)

Minister of Education: You have asked several related questions in relation to the ongoing review of all projects in capital planning.

Firstly, I refer you to the answers I have given on the timescale for the Bangor Grammar School project in AQW 4637/10 and to AQO 928/10. The position remains unchanged.

In relation to the issue of community involvement in decisions on new capital builds; this issue is addressed within the context of an Economic Appraisal (EA). An EA is, as you will know, a pre-requisite for every major capital scheme and agreeing the options to be included in the EA involves extensive engagement with the school and its community.

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GCSE Gaeilge

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education what grade of GCSE Gaeilge is considered a competent level of literacy.

(AQW 5742/10)

Minister of Education: Glactar go forleathan leis, d'fhormhór na ndaoine óga, go bhfuil gnóthú 5 GCSE ar a laghad ag A*-C, lena n-áirítear Matamaitic agus an Ghaeilge nó Béarla, riachtanach le dul ar aghaidh go breisoideachas agus go hardoidreachas agus le postanna ar phá maith a bhaint amach.

It is widely accepted that, for the majority of young people, achievement of at least 5 GCSEs (or equivalent) at A*-C, including Maths and Gaeilge or English, is necessary to progress to further and higher education and to well-paid jobs.

I very much recognise the importance of young people having functional competence in Gaeilge. The revised Gaeilge GCSE specification for first teaching from September 2010 has embedded within it the requirements for Level 2 functionality in Communication. This means that achievement at grade C and above in this GCSE signifies attainment of the relevant functionality.

GCSE English Language

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education what grade of GCSE English Language is considered a competent level of literacy.

(AQW 5743/10)

Minister of Education: Glactar go forleathan leis, d'fhormhór na ndaoine óga, go bhfuil gnóthú 5 GCSE ar a laghad ag A*-C, lena n-áirítear Matamaitic agus an Ghaeilge nó Béarla, riachtanach le dul ar aghaidh go breisoideachas agus go hardoidreachas agus le postanna ar phá maith a bhaint amach.

It is widely accepted that, for the majority of young people, achievement of at least 5 GCSEs (or equivalent) at A*-C, including Maths and Gaelige or English, is necessary to progress to further and higher education and to well-paid jobs.

I very much recognise the importance of young people having functional competence in literacy. The revised English Language and English GCSE specifications for first teaching from September 2010 have

embedded within them the requirements for Level 2 functionality in Communication. This means that achievement at grade C and above in these GCSEs signifies attainment of the relevant functionality.

GCSE Maths

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education what grade of GCSE Maths is considered a competent level of numeracy.

(AQW 5744/10)

Minister of Education: Glactar go forleathan leis, d'fhormhór na ndaoine óga, go bhfuil gnóthú 5 GCSE ar a laghad ag A*-C, lena n-áirítear Matamaitic agus an Ghaeilge nó Béarla, riachtanach le dul ar aghaidh go breisoideachas agus go hardoideachas agus le postanna ar phá maith a bhaint amach.

It is widely accepted that, for the majority of young people, achievement of at least 5 GCSEs (or equivalent) at A*-C, including Maths and Gaelige or English, is necessary to progress to further and higher education and to well-paid jobs.

I very much recognise the importance of young people having functional competence in numeracy. The revised Mathematics GCSE specification for first teaching from September 2010 has embedded within it the requirements for Level 2 functionality in Application of Number. This means that achievement at grade C and above in this GCSE signifies attainment of the relevant functionality.

Qualification Equivalent to a Competent Level of Literacy or Numeracy

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education what examinations, apart from GCSEs, are offered to pupils at post-primary level in which they can gain a qualification equivalent to a competent level of literacy or numeracy.

(AQW 5745/10)

Minister of Education: Is faoi na scoileanna féin scrúduithe áirithe a thairiscint. Cé is moite de GCSEanna, tairgtear cáilíochtaí Eochairscileanna agus Scileanna Riachtanacha sa Chumarsáid agus i bhFeidhmiú na nUimhreacha.

The offer of particular examinations is a matter for individual schools. Apart from GCSEs, Key Skills and Essential Skills qualifications are offered in Communication and Application of Number. Attainment at Level 2 for Communication in either Key Skills or Essential Skills represents the target level of functional competence in that subject. Similarly, with Application of Number, attainment at Level 2 in either Key Skills or Essential Skills represents the target level of functional competence.

Youth Service Provision in Lagan Valley

Mr J Craig asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the budget for youth service provision in the Lagan Valley constituency for 2010/11; and (ii) if funding for any services or projects will no longer be available.

(AQW 5760/10)

Minister of Education: Soláthraíonn an Roinn Oideachais maoiniú do na Boird Oideachais agus Leabharlainne (BOLanna) le haghaidh soláthar Seirbhísí don Ógra ina gceantair. Tá na BOLanna freagrach as a mbuiséid a leithdháileadh, agus iad ag cur san áireamh go riartar acmhainní ar bhonn cothrom agus go bhfuil siad bunaithe ar mheasúnú 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 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 South Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB) who has responsibility for Youth Service provision in the Lagan Valley constituency area has advised that the SEELB will make a decision on the funding of 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 Schools

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education when work will commence on the newbuilds at (i) St Joseph's Primary School, Newry; (ii) St Oliver Plunkett Primary School, Forkhill; (iii) Dromintee Primary School; (iv) St Clare's Convent Abbey Primary School, Newry; (v) St Joseph's Primary School, Madden; and (vi) Carrick Primary School, Warrenpoint.

(AQW 5777/10)

Minister of Education: I bhfómhar na bliana 2009, d'fhógair mé athbhreithniú ar gach tionscadal móroibreacha caipitil. Cuideoidh an t-athbhreithniú seo le cur chuige níos straitéisí a fhorbairt ar chinntí infheistithe caipitil agus ar bhainistíocht eastát na scoileanna. Sa timpeallacht gheilleagrach reatha, cinnteoidh an t-athbhreithniú go n-úsáidfear gach acmhainn atá ar fáil chun na torthaí is fearr do pháistí agus an luach is fearr don cháiníocóir a bhaint amach. Mar gheall air seo, tá sé tábhachtach go ndearbhaíonn muid go bhfuil gach tionscadal caipitil ina n-infheistíonn muid inmharthana san fhadtéarma.

In the autumn of 2009, I announced a review of all proposed major capital work projects. 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.

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 the review is currently ongoing, I cannot at this time provide a timeframe for work to commence on any newbuild projects.

Literacy and Numeracy Taskforce

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education to detail the dates on which the Literacy and Numeracy Taskforce met with her departmental officials to discuss the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy; and what advice the Taskforce gave to her officials.

(AQW 5779/10)

Minister of Education: Bhí deis ag an Tascfhórsa um Litearthacht agus Uimhearthacht chun dréachtaí na Straitéise um Litearthacht agus Uimhearthacht a chóradh agus phléigh sé iad seo le m'fheidhmeannaigh ag cruinnithe a tionóladh ar an 15 Meán Fómhair 2009, ar an 9 Nollaig 2009 agus ar an 10 Feabhra 2010.

The Literacy and Numeracy Taskforce has had the opportunity to consider drafts of the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy and discussed these with my officials at meetings held on 15 September 2009, 9 December 2009 and 10 February 2010.

At these meetings the Taskforce gave advice on a range of issues including

- best practice;
- long-term targets;
- support for schools, including guidance to support them implementing the Strategy;
- Phonics;

- the definition of underachievement;
- how the Strategy addresses Irish-medium Education;
- actions to implement the Strategy;
- assessing pupil progress, particularly in the cross-curricular skills of Communication and Using Mathematics

Irish-medium and Integrated Schools

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister of Education to detail the total administrative costs to her Department and the wider educational system of (i) Irish-medium schools; and (ii) integrated schools, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 5786/10)

Minister of Education: Tá Gaeloideachas agus oideachas comhtháite ina gcuid lárnach den chóras oideachais phríomhshrutha. Déanann foireann fud mo Roinne agus foireann eagraíochtaí eile oideachais Riarachán na scoileanna sna hearnálacha seo. Sna himthosca seo, ní féidir an caiteachas seo a dhí-chomhbhailiú.

Irish-medium and integrated education are an integral part of the mainstream education system. The Administration of schools in these sectors is carried out by staff throughout my Department and other educational bodies. In these circumstances it is not possible to disaggregate this expenditure

Pupils Attending Irish-medium and Integrated Schools

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister of Education to detail the current number of pupils, broken down by year, attending (i) Irish-medium schools; and (ii) integrated schools.

(AQW 5787/10)

Minister of Education: Tá an t-eolas ar líon na ndaltaí i nGaelscoileanna agus i scoileanna comhtháite mionsonraithe sna táblaí thíos. Tá an t-eolas ar líon na ndaltaí in aonaid Ghaeilge i scoileanna eile soláthraithe freisin.

Information on the number of pupils in Irish-medium and integrated schools is detailed in the tables below. Information on the numbers of pupils in Irish-medium units in other schools has also been provided.

PRIMARY SECTOR – IRISH-MEDIUM AND INTEGRATED SCHOOLS ENROLMENTS BY YEAR GROUP – 2009/10

School Type	Nursery	Reception	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7	Total enrolment
Irish-medium Schools	156	0	355	347	327	292	265	263	248	2,253
Irish-medium units	26	5	98	94	103	107	82	89	77	681
Integrated Schools	498	12	1,191	1,230	1,146	1,159	1,104	1,148	1,127	8,615

POST PRIMARY SECTOR – IRISH-MEDIUM AND INTEGRATED SCHOOLS ENROLMENTS BY YEAR GROUP – 2009/10

School Type	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11	Year 12	Year 13	Year 14	Total enrolment
Irish-medium Schools	90	82	91	80	97	64	57	561
Irish-medium units	30	28	26	28	29	3	1	145
Integrated Schools	2,043	2,077	2,078	2,124	2,096	948	733	12,099

Source: School census.

Note:

- Figures for primary schools include pupils in nursery, reception and year 1 – 7 classes.
- Integrated schools include 'Controlled integrated' and 'Grant maintained integrated'.

Religious Background of Pupils Attending Integrated Schools

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister of Education (i) to detail the different religious background of pupils attending integrated schools; and (ii) whether any of these schools currently fail to meet any of the criteria for integrated status; and for how long has each school failed to meet the criteria.
(AQW 5788/10)

Minister of Education: My Department's policy is that Grant Maintained Integrated schools should have at least 30% of pupils drawn from the minority community at the school. Existing schools transforming to integrated status (Controlled Integrated) must demonstrate the ability to achieve a minimum of 10% of their first year intake drawn from the minority tradition within the school's enrolment and the potential to achieve a minimum of 30% in the longer term.

Pupils that are recorded as not belonging to either of the main traditions (Protestant or Catholic) are recorded as 'other' and are not included in the consideration of religious balance as there is no legislative requirement to do so.

There are currently 61 Integrated schools in the north of Ireland comprising of 41 Primary schools and 20 Post-primary schools.

Léiríonn daonáireamh scoile na bliana 2009 nach bhfuil 14 bunscoil agus 7 n-iarbhunscoil ag baint bheartas na Roinne amach um 30% den iontráil a ghlacadh ón phobal mionlaigh.

The 2009 school census indicates that 14 Primary and 7 Post-primary schools are not currently meeting the Department's policy of achieving a 30% enrolment being drawn from the minority community.

Of the 21 schools that have been unable to meet the Department's policy on minority enrolment for integrated schools, 2 of the schools have not achieved the required minority percentage for 7 consecutive years, 3 of the schools for 6 years, 1 for 5 years, 3 for 4 years and 2 of the schools for 3 years. Five of the schools did not reach the 30% minority intake for the second year running and for 3 of the schools 2009/10 has been the first year when they have been unable to achieve the required minority enrolment. Included in this figure are 2 newly transformed schools which require only a 10% minority intake in the initial period and which the Department will monitor to establish if a long-term enrolment of 30% can be achieved.

Wage Increase for Teachers and Auxiliary Staff

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Education how Board Governors will be able to pay the wage increase for teachers and auxiliary staff of between 1% and 3%, given that funding allocated to each school has been frozen by her Department.

(AQW 5795/10)

Minister of Education: Tá sé sceidealaithe go mbuailfidh an Coiste Feidhmiúcháin ag deireadh na míosa le haontú ar bhuiséid athbhreithnithe deiridh do ranna sa bhliain 2010/11. Ní bheidh mé in ann pleananna buiséid a chur i gcrích sula mbainfear aontú an Choiste Feidhmiúcháin amach. Dearbhóidh mé buiséid a luaithe agus is féidir ina dhiaidh seo.

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.

Provision of a Nursery Within Ballycloghan Primary School

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Education what discussions she has had with (i) the South Eastern Education and Library Board; and (ii) the Board of Governors in relation to the provision of a nursery within Ballycloghan Primary School.

(AQW 5796/10)

Minister of Education: Ní raibh díospóireachtaí ar bith agam ná ag m'fheidhmeannaigh le Bord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an Oirdheiscirt, ná le Bord Gobharnóirí ar Ballycloghan Primary School maidir le foráil na naíscolaíochta ar an scoil.

Neither I nor any of my officials have had any discussions with the South Eastern Education and Library Board, or the Board of Governors of Ballycloghan Primary School regarding the provision of a nursery at the school.

Compulsory Subjects for Post-primary Schools

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Education, under the current curriculum, which subjects are compulsory for post-primary schools to teach at (i) pre GCSE Level; (ii) GCSE Level; and (iii) A Level.

(AQW 5809/10)

Minister of Education: Faoin churaclam athbhreithnithe, rud a bhfuil feidhm aige ar dhaltaí d'aois éigeantach scoile (suas go dtí 16), ní mór deiseanna chun eolas agus scileanna a fhorbairt in oideachas reiligiúnach agus sna Réimsí Foghlama seo a leanas a sholáthar do dhaltaí ag Eochairchéim 3:

Under the revised curriculum, which applies to pupils of compulsory school age (up to 16), pupils at Key Stage 3 must be provided with opportunities to develop knowledge and skills in Religious Education and the following Areas of Learning:

- Language and literacy
- Mathematics and numeracy
- Modern languages (as a minimum, pupils must study one of the official languages of the EU)
- The Arts (Art and Design, Music and Drama)
- Environment and Society (History and Geography)
- Science and Technology
- Learning for Life and Work (Employability, Local and Global citizenship, Personal Development and Home Economics)
- Physical Education

The curriculum requirements at Key Stage 4 give pupils more choice and flexibility, with the focus, via implementation of the Entitlement Framework, on increasing the range and nature of courses available to young people rather than on requiring the study of specific subjects. Post-primary schools are expected to offer all pupils the opportunity to follow a GCSE or equivalent level 2 course in English or Gaelige and in Mathematics. They are also required to provide a balanced offering of courses that reflect the Areas of Learning listed above. Additionally, Religious Education, Physical Education and Learning for Life and Work (excluding Home Economics) remain compulsory at Key Stage 4.

In both Key Stages the curriculum must also include the cross-curricular skills of communication, using mathematics and using information and communications technology.

Full details of the statutory content of the revised curriculum can be found in The Education (NI) Order 2006 and the Education (Curriculum Minimum Content) Order (NI) 2007.

No subjects are compulsory at A-level.

Literacy and Numeracy Strategy

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education when the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy will be published given that the consultation period ended in November 2008.

(AQW 5815/10)

Minister of Education: Tá an Straitéis athbhreithnithe um Litearthacht agus Uimhearthacht á tabhairt chun críche faoi láthair agus eiseofar í roimh i bhfad.

The revised Literacy and Numeracy Strategy is currently being finalised and will be released shortly.

It is important that we take the time to get this strategy right and to ensure that it flows from, and is connected to, wider work on school improvement and on assessment arrangements to support the revised curriculum.

Policy on Irish-medium Education

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education when the policy on Irish-medium education will be published.

(AQW 5817/10)

Minister of Education: Mionsonraíonn an tAthbhreithniú ar an Ghaelscolaíocht, a foilsíodh le haghaidh comhairlithe i mí Dheireadh Fómhair 2008, moltaí ar an bhealach chun tosaigh do chuid mhór de pholasaithe mo Roinne um Ghaeloideachas. Ghlac mé leis na moltaí seo i mí an Mhárta anuraidh agus d'oibrigh mo Roinn le heochairpháirtithe leasmhara ó shin chun na moltaí a fhorbairt trasna raoin eochair-réimsí. Chuir mo Roinn Grúpa Monatóireachta ar bun a fholáonn ionadaithe ó Chomhairle na Gaelscolaíochta agus ó lontaobhas na Gaelscolaíochta le cinntiú go bhforbraítear, go bhfeidhmítear agus go bpoiblítear polasaithe de réir mar is gá.

The Review of Irish-medium Education, which was published for consultation in October 2008, details recommendations on the way forward on many of my Department's policies on Irish-medium education. I accepted these recommendations in March last year and since then my Department has been working with key stakeholders to progress the recommendations across a range of key areas. My Department has established a Monitoring Group which includes representatives from Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta and lontaobhas na Gaelscolaíochta to ensure that policies are developed, implemented and publicised as necessary.

Home Schooling

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Education how many children have been registered as being home schooled in each of the last ten years.

(AQW 5849/10)

Minister of Education: Níl aon phróiseas cláraithe ná aon cheanglas dleathach ar thuismitheoirí comhairle a thabhairt dá mBord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne ná don Roinn maidir lena chinneadh a theagasc sa bhaile. Sholáthair na Boird Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an t-eolas sa tábla seo a leanas agus tá sé bunaithe ar fhógraí a fuarthas go bhfuil páiste á theagasc sa bhaile. Is féidir go ndearnadh na fógraí seo ag thuismitheoirí, ag iarscoil an pháiste, ag rann aistrithe an Bhoird nó ag an tSeirbhís Leasa Oideachais.

There is no registration process or legal requirement for parents to advise their Education and Library Board or the Department of their decision to home educate. The information in the following table has been provided by the Education and Library Boards and is based on notifications received that a child is being home educated. These notifications may have been made by parents, a child's previous school, the Board's transfer department or the Education Welfare Service.

School Year	Number of home educated children
2004/05*	170
2005/06	195
2006/07	171
2007/08	189
2008/09	204

* figures provided by the SEELB for 2004/05 and 2005/06 include pupils in the primary sector only. Post-primary figures are only available from the 2006/07 school year.

It should be noted that all figures are cumulative and therefore the same children may be included in Board figures for more than one school year.

Review of Capital Projects

Dr S Farry asked the Minister of Education when the review of her Department's capital projects will be completed.

(AQW 5856/10)

Minister of Education: Tá an t-athbhreithniú caipitil ar siúl agus tá m'fheidhmeannaigh ag obair chun an próiseas a chríochnú, a ghaiste is féidir. Mar gheall ar thábhacht an táisc seo, áfach, tá sé ríthábhachtach go mbailítear fianaise láidir agus go dtugtar breithniú iomlán ar gach tionscadal, sula ndéanfar aon chinneadh. Tá mé ag súil le go mbeidh mé in ann fógra a dhéanamh sa ghar-thodhchaí.

The capital review is ongoing and my officials are working to complete the process, as quickly as possible. Given the importance of this task, however, it is essential that robust evidence is collated and that full consideration is given to each project, before a decision is taken. I expect to be in a position to make an announcement in the near future.

Bonuses Paid to Non-Civil Servants

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Education for a breakdown of any bonuses paid in the 2009/10 financial year to persons, other than civil servants, from within the Department's overall budget.

(AQW 5859/10)

Minister of Education: Níor íoc mo Roinn aon bhónais le neamh-státseirbhísigh sa bhliain airgeadais 2009/10.

My Department has not paid any bonuses to non civil servants in the 2009/10 financial year.

Department for Employment and Learning

Education Maintenance Allowance

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister for Employment and Learning if there is a minimum attendance (i) per week; and (ii) per term for students receiving an Education Maintenance Allowance.

(AQW 5509/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning (Sir Reg Empey): In order to receive an Education Maintenance Allowance, eligible students must be undertaking a minimum of 15 hours of guided study per week for the duration of a course at a Further Education College or be studying full-time at school.

Responsibility for recording and monitoring attendance for students receiving Education Maintenance Allowance rests with the colleges and schools. Attendance at Further Education courses is recorded and monitored in accordance with the attendance procedures and is collated at the end of each week. Students studying full-time at school have daily attendance checks (morning and afternoon) which are collated at the end of each week. These students' attendance records are subject to examination by my Department's Finance and Audit Support Team.

Education Maintenance Allowance

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how attendance at courses is monitored for students who receive an Education Maintenance Allowance.

(AQW 5510/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: In order to receive an Education Maintenance Allowance, eligible students must be undertaking a minimum of 15 hours of guided study per week for the duration of a course at a Further Education College or be studying full-time at school.

Responsibility for recording and monitoring attendance for students receiving Education Maintenance Allowance rests with the colleges and schools. Attendance at Further Education courses is recorded and monitored in accordance with the attendance procedures and is collated at the end of each week. Students studying full-time at school have daily attendance checks (morning and afternoon) which are collated at the end of each week. These students' attendance records are subject to examination by my Department's Finance and Audit Support Team.

Education Maintenance Allowance

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what criteria is used to assess students for an Education Maintenance Allowance.

(AQW 5511/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: Education Maintenance Allowance is a means-tested allowance for students who remain at a school or a Further Education College and celebrate their 16th, 17th, 18th or 19th birthdays between the 2nd July 2008 and 1st July 2009. Students must also be resident in the United Kingdom for three years prior to the 1st September.

For academic year 2009/10, the following income bands were used to calculate entitlement to Education Maintenance Allowance.

Gross Household Income	EMA Entitlement (per week)
Less than £21,885	£30
£21,886 - £26,840	£20
£26,841 - £32,400	£10
£32,401 or more	£0

The allowance is linked to satisfactory attendance and is paid on a fortnightly basis. In addition to the weekly payment, students may also receive periodic bonuses of £100 if they remain on their course and make good progress with their learning.

Apprenticeships

Mr M Durkan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many people have been enrolled in apprenticeships in each of the last three years, broken down by constituency.

(AQW 5555/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: The data in the table, attached in Annex A, lists the number of apprentices who have enrolled in each of the last three years by constituency.

Annex A

Table 1. Number of people commencing apprenticeships by Constituency, 2007-2009

Constituency	Number of Apprenticeships 2007	Number of Apprenticeships 2008	Number of Apprenticeships 2009
Belfast East	180	269	318
Belfast North	221	331	315
Belfast South	151	248	282
Belfast West	316	424	445
East Antrim	276	352	353
East Londonderry	209	344	368
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	346	479	539
Foyle	269	392	387
Lagan Valley	258	401	444
Mid Ulster	364	417	331
Newry and Armagh	281	417	481
North Antrim	367	487	432
North Down	175	209	220
South Antrim	321	509	425
South Down	352	502	473
Strangford	256	324	350
Upper Bann	234	371	399
West Tyrone	281	459	532
Unknown	76	160	175
Total	4933	7095	7269

Source: DEL Client Management System

Notes: Apprenticeships are mapped to Constituency on the basis of postcode. Those with incomplete/missing postcodes are categorised as Unknown. "Unknowns" are included in the table above.

Programme-led Apprenticeship Scheme

Mr M Durkan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on the measures that he intends to implement to ensure work placements for those in the Programme-led Apprenticeship scheme, particularly in areas of high unemployment.

(AQW 5556/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: The main change under consideration is to increase the number of employer placement days up to a maximum of 3 days per week. This will provide an opportunity for the participant to accrue work-based evidence towards the achievement of NVQ Level 2.

It is hoped that this flexibility will mean that more employers will be prepared to provide placements, and that they will find it easier to plan something meaningful and relevant for participants. A number of Sector Skills Councils have indicated to the Department that, while they may have reservations about the programme, they would be prepared to encourage employers in their sector to offer placements.

While it is largely anecdotal, the view coming from a variety of different sources is that an increase in the number of placement days permissible could make it easier for training providers to secure placements. The Programme-led apprenticeship approach is particularly relevant in areas of

high unemployment, where employers have been less able to employ apprentices under the Department's flagship ApprenticeshipsNI programme.

Full-time Lecturers Employed by the University of Ulster

Mr D Simpson asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many full-time lecturers employed by the University of Ulster also have a second job.

(AQW 5594/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: This information is not collated by either my Department or the University of Ulster. It is not possible, therefore, to provide the response requested.

Future Jobs Fund

Mr P Butler asked the Minister for Employment and Learning (i) if he has made any representations to his counterparts in the Department of Work and Pensions for Northern Ireland to be included in the Future Jobs Fund; and (ii) what plans he has to step up a similar fund for 18-24 year olds.

(AQW 5637/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: Employment is a devolved matter in Northern Ireland so it would not be appropriate for me to make representations to the Department for Work and Pensions to be included in the Future Jobs Fund in Great Britain.

My Department is currently piloting 2 schemes that will test the concept of the Future Jobs Fund in Northern Ireland. A temporary employment programme for long-term unemployed young people (18 to 24 year olds) is currently available in Belfast. This is providing 60 young people with 26 weeks work experience in local government. The scheme also makes provision for any identified training needs that might improve participants' employment prospects in the longer term. Recruitment is underway and, not surprisingly there has been substantial interest in the jobs available.

An internship scheme for unemployed graduates is also underway. A total of 70 places are available for those unemployed in the 2008 and 2009 graduate cohorts. Provision is split between Belfast and Londonderry (50/20 places respectively). Again there has been significant interest in the scheme with the majority of posts already filled.

The Department is investing £800,000 in these pilots and will evaluate them later in the year to determine if they have any impact on the long-term employment prospects of participants. If there is clear evidence of a positive impact and subject to resource availability, the Department may consider making the schemes more widely available.

Programme-led Apprenticeship Scheme

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what feedback or complaints his Department has received regarding the Programme-led Apprenticeships scheme.

(AQO 962/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: Feedback on the Programme-Led Apprenticeship programme has been mixed. There is an appreciation that the Department is responding to the very real problem of the lack of employment of apprentices in the economic downturn, and some sectors support the concept. However, some sectors have concerns that the programme could discourage employers from employing apprentices.

The programme has proved to be very popular, with almost 3,000 young people participating on the programme. It is too soon to assess its effectiveness, but the fact that the programme is based on normal apprenticeship frameworks should help participants to progress to employed apprentice status when the economy picks up. In the meantime, my Department is trying to address the issue of employer placements, by introducing some flexibility into the placement arrangements.

The proposed changes to the programme have not yet been introduced. The Department has met with the Alliance of Sector Skills Councils to provide them with an opportunity to reflect their employers' views on the issue. The Department will continue to work with Sector Skills Councils in implementing any changes to the programme.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to re-iterate my commitment to the employer-led ApprenticeshipNI programme as the preferred model for apprenticeship training in Northern Ireland. However, employers have a responsibility to make this work by employing apprentices.

Lifelong Learning: Fees

Mrs C McGill asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on concessionary fees for older people involved in lifelong learning.

(AQO 967/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: All six Colleges continue to provide concessionary fees to individuals, including older people, on a means tested basis, reflecting of the learners' ability to pay. It is, however, no longer lawful for Further Education colleges to offer age-based concessions.

In addition, the Older People's Advocate has been commissioned by the Office of First Minister and deputy First Minister to examine the impact of the withdrawal of aged based concessionary fees, following the introduction of the Employment Equality (Age) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006 (S.R. No. 261), which came into effect on 1st October 2006. My Department looks forward to the report's publication, which is expected by the end of May.

Skills Challenges Facing the Economy

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline the skills challenges facing the Northern Ireland economy; and how his Department and the Executive can respond to these challenges.

(AQO 968/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: In order to gain a better understanding of the current and future economy, and the likely macro level demand for skills, the Department (along with DETI and DFP) commissioned Oxford Economics to produce a report entitled 'Forecasting Future Skill Needs in Northern Ireland'. It outlines a number of challenges which will need to be addressed if we are to have the future workforce we require. These include:

- the need to upskill the current workforce including improvements in the essential skills of Literacy, Numeracy and ICT;
- the need for higher level skills;

- an increased demand for Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics skills;
- a need for increased management and leadership skills; and
- the need to attract skilled people to Northern Ireland.

My Department has drafted a revised Skills Strategy which contains a number of recommendations on how to address these challenges. This has gone to the Executive for consideration.

Young People Not in Education, Employment or Training

Mr M McLaughlin asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on the scoping study on young people not in education, employment or training.

(AQO 969/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: The information-gathering stage of the scoping study on those who are not in education, employment or training is now complete and the report on the study is currently at final drafting stages within my Department. Throughout the information-gathering process officials have engaged with a wide range of relevant organisations in the statutory and voluntary and community sectors. Officials also attended the recent Employment and Learning Committee seminar on the subject, and have briefed the Committee on the emerging findings of the study.

While the Department for Employment and Learning has taken the lead in the scoping study, and has in place a wide range of programmes and activities to help people to enter and remain in education, employment or training, it is clear that the issues affecting these young people are cross-departmental and multi-agency in nature. For example, it is telling and very pertinent that in the year 2007/2008, 80% of our young people who left school at 16 did not achieve at least 5 GCSEs at grades A*-C (including equivalents) including English and Maths. This represents a very significant level of under achievement which impacts adversely on the life chances of our young people and this would need to be addressed in any future strategy.

Students with Disabilities

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Employment and Learning if he can provide an assurance that services for students with disabilities will not be reduced in the 2010/11 financial year.

(AQO 970/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: Subject to final decisions by the Executive regarding the 2010-11 budget and its endorsement by the Assembly, my Department has no plans to reduce any services for students with disabilities in the 2010/11 financial year. However, in the current economic climate no government Department can give categorical assurance on public funding into the future.

Unemployment: Young People

Mr D McKay asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what measures he is taking to address the increase in youth unemployment.

(AQO 971/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: There is a wide range of measures in place to address the increase in youth unemployment. For young people age 16 – 18, Programme-Led Apprenticeships were introduced as an intervention measure to combat the economic downturn. This measure guaranteed training of up to 104 weeks, with the flexibility for participants to transfer to the employer-led ApprenticeshipsNI programme should the opportunity arise.

The Department's other programmes under Training for Success are Skills for Life and Skills for Work continue to be offered to unemployed young people 16 – 18.

For those young people aged 18 – 24, a comprehensive range of services is available through my Department's Jobs and Benefits offices and JobCentres and through contracted Providers to help all unemployed young people find work.

'Steps to Work', the main return to work programme, is available to anyone who is aged 18 years old or over and who is unemployed or economically inactive.

The Department has also introduced a range of additional measures to assist people in the current difficult economic climate. These include immediate access to 'Step One' provision, such as up-dating their Curriculum Vitae or improving interview / jobsearch skills; access to Step 2 provision, such as undertaking a new qualification or retraining in a new occupational area for those out of work for 13 weeks or more; provision for Construction, Engineering and Motor Vehicle Apprentices, who have lost their jobs due to the downturn, to complete the NVQ element of an Apprenticeship Framework with Steps providers; the upper limit for short-term training costs under Steps provision has been raised to £2,000; and introduction of a Waged Strand within the Steps to Work programme aimed at a specific, identified target group who have not worked for 30 months or more which will provide up to 26 weeks employment with voluntary/community sector organisations.

An internship scheme has also been introduced for unemployed graduates.

Titanic Quarter: Employment

Ms D Purvis asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many Employment Service clients from East Belfast have secured employment as part of the Titanic Quarter development.

(AQO 972/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: The Employment Service does not collate information on clients securing employment with particular employers. To date the majority of employment opportunities associated with the Titanic Project have been within the construction industry and the main contractors on site have subcontracted these.

Records of subcontractor employees are not retained by the main contractors.

My Department has seconded a member of staff to work with Belfast City Council on the Titanic Quarter Development.

St Mary's University College: UCAS

Rt Hon J Donaldson asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what steps he is taking to encourage St Mary's University College, Belfast to join the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service.

(AQO 973/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: As you are aware, St. Mary's University College, as with all other Higher Education Institutions in Northern Ireland, is responsible for its own policies and practises, including admission procedures.

There is no obligation for any Higher Education Institution to join the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS). However, Higher Education Institutions are expected to have an appropriate admissions policy which ensures that admissions are carried out on the basis of fair, transparent, reliable and objective criteria, applied equitably and consistently.

Therefore, the Department has no plans to encourage St. Mary's to join UCAS.

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Disadvantaged Areas Policy

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment if the Disadvantaged Areas policy has been given any weighting in the scoring of tenders by her Department since it was introduced in 2006; and to which specific tenders the weighting has been applied.

(AQW 5424/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mrs A Foster): DETI has not given the Disadvantaged Area map, which was published in 2006, any weighting in the scoring of tenders.

Disadvantaged Areas Policy

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what specific measures are used to implement her Department's Disadvantaged Areas policy.

(AQW 5425/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: DETI used data from the income and employment domains of the 2005 Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure (NIMDM) to draw up its current Disadvantaged Area map which identifies Strabane, Omagh, Cookstown, Newry and Mourne, Dungannon and Derry Council areas, together with pockets of Belfast, as the focus for Departmental policies and programmes which can contribute towards tackling disadvantage. DETI and its agencies aim to pay particular attention to Disadvantaged Areas through the delivery of key policies and programmes. In particular, there are two PSA targets within Programme for Government 2008-2011 relating to the targeting of Disadvantaged Areas:

- PSA 1, Objective 2 includes the Invest NI target "70% of new FDI (foreign direct investment) projects secured to locate within 10 miles of an area of economic disadvantage"; and
- PSA 3, Objective 3 similarly contains an Invest NI target "75% of land acquisition (acres) in areas of economic disadvantage".

By end-February 2010, 31 (or 84%) of the 37 new FDI projects secured, that have decided upon a location, have chosen to locate within 10 miles of an area of economic disadvantage and Invest NI is currently progressing land acquisition projects in four areas, three of which (Strabane, Omagh and Newry) fall within an area of economic disadvantage.

In addition to using data from NIMDM to develop its Disadvantaged Area map, DETI has used the overall NIMDM ranking for each Council area as one of the key criteria for determining those areas in which the Department would fund debt advisers as part of a new face to face debt advice service for 2009-11.

Disadvantaged Areas Policy

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail how each of the following areas have benefited from her Department's Disadvantaged Areas policy (i) Newry and Mourne District Council; (ii) Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council; (iii) Derry City Council; (iv) Omagh District Council; (v) Strabane District Council; and (vi) Cookstown District Council.

(AQW 5426/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Between 1 April 2008 and 28 February 2010, each of the areas listed have benefited from Invest NI's specific Programme for Government measures targeted at areas of economic disadvantage as follows:

- (i) Five new FDI (foreign direct investment) projects have decided to locate within Newry and Mourne District Council area. These projects plan to invest approximately £3.4 million in the area creating 70 new jobs.
- (ii) Three new FDI projects have decided to locate within Dungannon and South Tyrone District Council area. These projects plan to invest approximately £3.6 million in the area creating 68 new jobs.
- (iv) One new FDI project has decided to locate within Omagh District Council area. This project plans to invest approximately £7.6 million in the area creating 27 new jobs.

Invest NI is also continuing to progress four land acquisition projects, three of which are in Council areas identified on DETI's Disadvantaged Area map: Newry, Strabane & Omagh. When completed, these projects will provide property solutions that have the potential to significantly benefit businesses and facilitate future economic growth in those areas.

In rolling out a new face to face debt advice service for 2009-2011, DETI used the Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure ranking for each Council area as one of the key criteria in determining those areas in which the Department would fund debt advisers. As part of an overall £550,000 contract aimed at delivering some 600 hours of debt advice per week through Advice NI, four of six Council areas listed were allocated the following hours:

- (i) Newry and Mourne District Council area - 56.25 hours
- (iv) Omagh District Council area - 18.75 hours
- (v) Strabane District Council area - 37.5 hours
- (vi) Cookstown District Council area - 37.5 hours

In addition, all of the Disadvantaged Areas listed have benefitted from a range of telecommunications projects specifically aimed at addressing telecommunications needs and disadvantage.

2012 Olympics

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what steps she is taking to ensure local businesses can secure contracts for work in relation to the 2012 Olympics.

(AQW 5468/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Last month I met with Lord Coe, Chairman of the London Organising Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games (LOCOG) and John Armitt, Chairman of the Olympic Delivery Authority (ODA) in London to discuss how Northern Ireland companies might secure more business opportunities arising from the 2012 Olympics. Olympics related contracts are published on a web portal, CompeteFor, and to be successful companies must comply with criteria such as Quality Management Systems, Health and Safety, and Equal Opportunities. Invest NI has undertaken a number of activities with companies in Northern Ireland to promote business opportunities arising from the 2012 Olympics and to support them in their efforts to win contracts in relation to 2012. These activities have included:

- e-zines
- conferences
- information seminars
- a visit to the Olympic Park
- facilitating meetings with tier one contractors in London
- developing dedicated 2012 Games web pages
- publishing a guide to professional tendering
- workshops in professional tendering and Quality Management Systems
- 1:1 consultancy support to selected companies to prepare bids

In May 2010, Invest NI will hold a business conference at which LOCOG will present the opportunities and timescales for the procurement of the goods, works and services they require to stage and implement the Games.

Electricity Prices

Lord Browne asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what action her Department is taking to ensure that the recent rise in electricity prices does not impact on economic recovery by placing an unsustainable burden on businesses.

(AQW 5469/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: I am acutely aware of concerns about the October 2009 increase in the cost of electricity for larger businesses.

All electricity customers in Northern Ireland, including business customers, benefitted from a one-off £100million Public Service Obligation (PSO) levy rebate in January 2009, which resulted in electricity price reductions for both domestic and business consumers.

Following re-introduction of the PSO levy from 1 October 2009, concerns by some large energy users about increases in their electricity costs led to the Utility Regulator commencing an inquiry in November 2009, which focused on how energy suppliers have communicated with, and set charges for, business electricity customers. The findings of this inquiry were published on 18 March 2010.

My officials will continue to work alongside the Utility Regulator to ensure longer-term strategic benefits for all energy customers, including businesses, for example, through the continued operation of the Single Electricity Market, the planned review by the Utility Regulator of the long term power generation contracts in Northern Ireland, and by reducing our over dependence on fossil fuels and their associated price volatility through greater use of sustainable energy sources.

Jobs Lost in the Upper Bann Constituency

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many people have lost their jobs in the Upper Bann constituency in each of the last three years.

(AQW 5495/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The table below provides the number of confirmed redundancies in the Upper Bann Parliamentary Constituency in each of the last three years. However, as companies are only legally required to provide details of impending redundancies of 20 or more employees, this is not a full count of job losses. Therefore, the net change in the number of unemployed claimants in the Upper Bann Parliamentary Constituency has been provided for information.

Number of Confirmed Redundancies and Net Change in Unemployed Claimants

in the Upper Bann Parliamentary Constituency, 2007 - 2009

Year	Confirmed Redundancies ¹	Net change in number of unemployed claimants ²
2007	75	-118
2008	407	384
2009	207	1,481

1 Please note that companies are only legally required to notify the Department of impending redundancies of 20 or more employees.

2 The net change in unemployed claimants is the change in the annual average claimant count in each of the years quoted e.g. the annual average claimant count for 2009 was 1,481 higher than the annual average for 2008.

Economic Strategy and Action Plan for the Upper Bann Constituency

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline her Department's current economic strategy and action plan for the Upper Bann constituency.

(AQW 5496/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The Programme for Government outlines the Executive's economic priorities and the actions DETI and other Departments are taking to support the growth of the Northern Ireland economy as a whole. My Department is taking forward actions to promote investment and enterprise, increase innovation and exports, improve our telecoms infrastructure, and boost tourism activity across Northern Ireland.

DETI, through Invest NI, has provided considerable support for the local economy in Upper Bann. Indeed, between 2002/03 and 2008/09, Invest NI assistance to client companies in the constituency totalled over £70m. This support contributed towards planned investment of over £300m in the area. Invest NI has also assisted 1,275 start-ups in Upper Bann over that period, including a number of companies with the potential for growth outside Northern Ireland.

Looking forward, and as I indicated in my statement to the Assembly on the Independent Review of Economic Policy, I have accepted the recommendation that a sub-committee of the Executive should be established to prioritise cross-departmental action on the economy. Furthermore, I have proposed that this sub-committee take forward the development of an economic strategy.

Northern Ireland is a small region, and I firmly believe we should have a single overarching economic strategy in place to grow the economy as we emerge from the recession. I have suggested that this should be completed in time to inform the next Programme for Government, and I am currently seeking Executive agreement on how best we take this important work forward.

Promoting Entrepreneurship and Supporting Small Businesses

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail her Department's investment plans in (i) Brownlow Limited; (ii) Mayfair Business Centre; (iii) Craigavon Industrial Development Centre; and (iv) Banbridge Enterprise Agency, in relation to promoting entrepreneurship and supporting small businesses in the 2010/11 financial year.

(AQW 5497/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Invest NI offers support to new and existing businesses through the Enterprise Development Programmes (EDP) which are delivered by Enterprise NI (ENI) on behalf of Invest NI. Both Craigavon Industrial Development Centre (CIDO) and Banbridge Enterprise Agency (BEA) are part of the ENI network.

The Enterprise Development Programmes are a suite of programmes tailored specifically to assist new and existing businesses to develop and grow. The Programmes consist of:

- The Go for It programme (aimed at Early Stage and Start-Ups)
- The Growth Programme (aimed at existing small businesses)

Brownlow Ltd and Mayfair Business Centre are not part of EDP delivery, nor are they part of the Enterprise NI network.

Mountain Biking Tourism

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (i) to provide the most up-to-date figures for the number of mountain biking tourists in each of the last 24 months; and (ii) what action her Department is taking to promote Northern Ireland as a destination for mountain biking tourism.

(AQW 5519/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:

- (i) Within Northern Ireland there are no official mountain bike trails, and therefore mountain bikers from other countries generally do not visit Northern Ireland. The Northern Ireland Tourist Board is unable to collect any data regarding the participation of this activity from its national passenger survey. However, the Countryside Access and Activities Network estimate participation figures within Northern Ireland to be around 15,000 per annum. Comparable figures for Scotland for mountain biking are in the region of 123,000 per annum.
- (ii) The Northern Ireland Tourist Board is currently appraising several projects that include the development of mountain bike trails across Northern Ireland. The development of these trails would enable Northern Ireland to host a range of mountain biking events and the potential to market Northern Ireland as a world class short break destination for this activity.

2012 Olympics

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment if she has had any discussions with local businessmen in relation to obtaining contracts for work for the 2012 Olympics.

(AQW 5542/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: When I visit companies and meet with local business people, I discuss opportunities for their business and, depending on the nature of their product or service, this often includes opportunities arising from the London 2012 Olympics.

I am keen to see more Northern Ireland companies win business from the Olympics and last month I had a meeting in London with Lord Coe on this matter. In addition, Invest NI has undertaken a number of activities with companies in Northern Ireland to promote business opportunities arising from the 2012 Olympics and to support them in their efforts to win contracts in relation to 2012.

Licence for the Supply of Natural Gas

Mr G Campbell asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 5050/10, how much has been raised in revenue from firms who have applied for gas supply licences but have not activated them.

(AQW 5551/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Fees paid to the Utility Regulator by inactive natural gas supply companies to cover the licence application and administrative costs for maintaining a company's gas supply licence have, to date, amounted to £4,000.

World Expo 2010 in Shanghai

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what plans there are for Northern Ireland to be represented at the World Expo 2010 in Shanghai.

(AQO 984/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Invest Northern Ireland already has a detailed programme of market visits to Asia in place that are designed to help Northern Ireland companies access new customers and develop important business links. As such, there are no plans for Northern Ireland to have representation at Shanghai Expo 2010. In November 2009, thirty companies took part in an Invest NI trade mission to China and a further eight companies have recently returned from a mission to Malaysia and Vietnam. Invest NI's 2010 programme includes further trade missions to China in May and November and to South Korea and Taiwan in September.

Support for Reconditioned Technology

Mr J McCallister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of why support for reconditioned technology, particularly in the wind energy sector, has been omitted from (i) the UK Government's proposed Feed-in Tariff scheme; and (ii) the proposed improvements to the Renewables Obligation Certificates scheme in Northern Ireland.

(AQW 5769/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The Feed-In Tariff scheme for small-scale generation, which comes into operation in GB on 1 April 2010, is not open to refurbished or renovated generating equipment. It is the UK Government's view that such equipment has a different cost base to new technology and is therefore excluded. However, the Department of Energy and Climate Change has stated that it will keep this issue under review.

There is currently no such prohibition on reconditioned technology under the Northern Ireland Renewables Obligation (NIRO). However, as stated in the Government response to the statutory consultation on the NIRO published in February 2010, further work will be required on the definition of refurbishment and replacement. Proposals on how reconditioned technology will be dealt with in future will be included in the next NIRO consultation which will issue later during 2010.

Geothermal Energy

Mr B Armstrong asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment if she is aware of any potential projects to exploit the use of geothermal energy in Northern Ireland.

(AQO 995/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Geothermal energy is now being exploited in an increasing number of commercial, public sector and housing developments in Northern Ireland.

I am pleased that Ballymena District Council was successful in securing government support for a project under the Low Carbon Communities Challenge. While the first phase is to develop a small district heating network fuelled on biomass, the Council hopes that a secondary phase would involve moving to a deep geothermal energy source.

Geological Survey Northern Ireland has received several enquiries about deep geothermal energy in other areas of Northern Ireland but is unaware of any firm project proposals.

Jobs Strategy

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment if she will commit to working with her Executive colleagues to develop a cross-departmental jobs strategy.

(AQO 996/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: I continue to work closely with my Executive colleagues on all matters relating to the economy.

As I indicated in my statement to the Assembly on the Independent Review of Economic Policy, I am currently seeking agreement to establish a sub-committee of the Executive which will further prioritise action on the economy.

One of the first tasks of this sub-committee will be to produce an economic strategy that will outline how the Executive will continue to address the short-term employment issues resulting from the recession. It will also outline how we intend meeting our medium to longer term priorities, which remain the need to grow a dynamic economy and raise living standards throughout Northern Ireland.

Orange Heritage Trail

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether she will consider funding an Orange heritage trail.

(AQO 997/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: To date the Northern Ireland Tourist Board has not received a funding application for an Orange heritage trail.

However, I am supportive of the development of an Orange heritage trail which encourages tourists to visit sites which are not on the traditional tourism route.

In 2008 I jointly launched the Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland Williamite Trail, a tourist trail developed to encourage visitors to explore King William's journey from Londonderry to the site of the Battle of the Boyne. Proposed Orange museums at Loughgall and Schomberg House could be integrated into this trail, providing a focus for visitors.

Electricity Prices

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what action her Department has taken to date in response to the findings of the Douglas McIlldoon report into electricity prices.

(AQO 998/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Mr McIlldoon's report of November 2008, welcomed the establishment of the Single Electricity Market and endorsed the electricity price setting process amongst other things.

Since then my Department, working alongside the Utility Regulator, has been considering the various recommendations contained in the report in the context of changing energy markets and work on developing a new Strategic Energy Framework for Northern Ireland, which I hope to bring to the Executive very shortly.

UK City of Culture: Derry

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline her Department's involvement in Derry City Council's bid to become the first UK City of Culture.

(AQO 999/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: I recently addressed a business lunch in the city organised by Ilex to underline my support for the UK City of Culture bid and the wider regeneration of Londonderry.

I have also indicated my enthusiastic support to Derry City Council for their endeavours. I have written to the Minister for Culture, Arts and Leisure offering the practical support of my Department and its agencies.

Women in Enterprise

Mr J McCallister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the Women in Enterprise initiatives.

(AQO 1001/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The overall aim of Invest NI's Investing in Women initiative was to increase the number of women who start up in business in Northern Ireland, and the number who grow their business performance.

The Start a Business programme ended in March 2009 and saw female participation rates reaching 48%, from a base of 37% in 2007.

In terms of growth plans in female owned businesses, the Booster Programme had participation from over 60 female owned businesses and 11 new Invest NI clients were identified.

Targets were met and lessons learnt from these female specific programmes are now embraced within the Enterprise Development Programme – both the Go For It and Growth programme. Going forward, target participation rates for women within the Enterprise Development Programme have been set at 50%.

Gas Suppliers

Mr P Maskey asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what plans she has for a more efficient switching mechanism to allow customers to change gas suppliers so that they can avail of cheaper prices.

(AQO 1002/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The Utility Regulator has recently approved the implementation of a semi-automated switching system to improve the capacity for switching customers on credit meters, to be in place by November 2010. The Utility Regulator has also requested Phoenix Natural Gas and firmus energy to submit proposals to improve the capacity for switching customers on pre-payment meters with a decision on a proposal expected shortly.

Department of the Environment

Heather Moorland

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment (i) what steps he is taking to retain and enhance heather moorland; and (ii) what grants are available to do so.

(AQW 4446/10)

Minister of the Environment (Mr E Poots): (i) My Department is retaining and enhancing heather moorland by:

- (a) the declaration and protection of appropriate sites as Areas of Special Scientific Interest under the Environment Order and as Special Areas of Conservation under the Habitats Regulations;
 - (b) the publication and delivery of habitat action plans for blanket bog, lowland raised bog, upland heath, lowland heathland and montane heath and a species action plan for red grouse; and
 - (c) working with the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) who provide direct payments to farmers and administer agri-environment schemes.
- (ii) My Department has not currently been asked to provide any financial assistance to retain and enhance heather moorland. Any requests for such assistance would be considered according to the criteria set down in the Northern Ireland Environment Agency's Natural Heritage Grants Programme and in the context of existing DARD funding.

Claimants to DARD for certain direct agricultural support payments must maintain their land in Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition; one aspect of which states that claimants must retain all semi-natural habitats including moorland.

In addition DARD agri-environment schemes provide annual management payments to manage heather moorland positively and fund heather regeneration as part of an agreed moorland management plan. Currently there are approximately 55,000 ha of heather moorland being managed under DARD agri-environment scheme agreements.

Heather Moorland

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment how much heather moorland is currently retained compared to 10 years ago.

(AQW 4447/10)

Minister of the Environment: My Department does not monitor the cover of heather moorland as such but does undertake the Northern Ireland Countryside Survey (NICS). It assesses the distribution and condition of land habitat types and provides reliable estimates of how land cover changes over time. There were surveys conducted in 1998 and 2007.

The broad habitats which correspond most closely to what is referred to as heather moorland are Dwarf Shrub Heath and Bog.

Compared with 1998, the NICS 2007 survey reported a 20.4% increase in the area of Dwarf Shrub Heath, from 13,909 ha to 16,751ha. This change was associated with increased cover of heather species and is probably attributable to changes in upland grazing practices. Between 1998 and 2007, the NICS reported a small (net 2.0%) decrease in Bog, from 164,216ha to 160,902ha. However, these changes are not considered statistically significant.

In conclusion, at a broad habitat level, the NICS revealed very little overall net change in the amount of habitat which could be termed heather moorland.

Bonuses for the Planning Office

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the amount paid in bonuses for each divisional planning office in (i) 2003/04; (ii) 2004/05; (iii) 2005/06; (iv) 2006/07; (v) 2007/08; and (vii) 2008/09.

(AQW 5376/10)

Minister of the Environment: The table below sets out the total amount of bonuses paid to Planning Service staff by financial year and divisional planning office. The bonuses fall into two separate categories:

- The award of non-consolidated bonus payments is part of each year's Pay Awards. Non-consolidated bonuses are awarded to all NICS staff whose performance, as determined through the NICS Performance Management arrangements, is judged to be above a satisfactory level (i.e. Box 1 and Box 2 performers). The level of bonuses has varied over the years but for the three years up to 2008, a Box 1 award was worth £150 and a Box 2 award £50.
- The award of bonuses under the Special Bonus Scheme. Special Bonuses can be awarded to staff in civil service grades below the Senior Civil Service (up to and including Grade 6) and set in the NICS Special Bonus Scheme. The scheme gives Departments discretion to reward exceptional performance in particularly demanding tasks or situations. The overall cost of special bonuses in each Department in any year, must not exceed 0.2 per cent of the pay bill and individual awards should not normally exceed £1,000.

Financial Year	Divisional Planning Office	Non-Consolidated Bonus	Special Bonus
2003/2004	Belfast	2155	2000
	Ballymena	2725	1746
	Craigavon	2800	4005
	Downpatrick	4180	1100
	Coleraine/Londonderry	4800	1700
	Omagh/Enniskillen	5520	1600
	Total	22180	12151
2004/2005	Belfast	7350	300
	Ballymena	10650	2350
	Craigavon	13080	0
	Downpatrick	8210	900
	Coleraine/Londonderry	9780	600
	Omagh/Enniskillen	14630	2275
	Total	63700	6425
2005/2006	Belfast	4734	1800
	Ballymena	4550	1590
	Craigavon	4800	1700
	Downpatrick	3800	2450
	Coleraine/Londonderry	3600	3460
	Omagh/Enniskillen	6928	1486

Financial Year	Divisional Planning Office	Non-Consolidated Bonus	Special Bonus
	Total	28412	12486
2006/2007	Belfast	4387	2050
	Ballymena	4100	2843
	Craigavon	3700	1700
	Downpatrick	2500	1000
	Coleraine/Londonderry	3650	2925
	Omagh/Enniskillen	4729	560
	Total	23066	11078
2007/2008	Belfast	4150	250
	Ballymena	3600	1250
	Craigavon	4150	450
	Downpatrick	3500	2200
	Coleraine/Londonderry	3550	250
	Omagh/Enniskillen	5200	3200
	Total	24150	7600
2008/2009	Belfast	3550	2500
	Ballymena	5450	1100
	Craigavon	5350	800
	Downpatrick	4950	0
	Coleraine/Londonderry	4000	3430
	Omagh/Enniskillen	6450	8400
	Total	29750	16230

Electronic Planning Information for Citizens System

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the Electronic Planning Information for Citizens system, including its projected cost and completion date.

(AQW 5452/10)

Minister of the Environment:

ePIC - Current Status

1. Progress on the ePIC project during the present financial year has had to be curtailed pending confirmation of additional funding by the Executive. Additional funding for the ePIC project for this financial year was agreed by the Executive in the December monitoring round.
2. The current position on ePIC is that all of the software required to complete and implement the project has been developed and integrated. The system has been successfully tested for end-to-end functionality, has been security accredited and performance testing is currently underway. Final testing by users of the system is well advanced. Seminars have taken place for consultee organisations, including local government, on the new e-consultation and other facilities ePIC will

provide. Further information seminars for planning agents and applicants are planned close to go-live. As part of the final preparations for roll-out, work is underway to transfer 1 million planning application records from the current IT system into ePIC.

3. Subject to capital funding being provided during 2010-11 to complete implementation of ePIC, it is planned to carry out an extensive programme of training for Planning Service managers and staff. This will coincide with the phased roll-out of the system across all Divisional Planning Offices.

ePIC Costs

4. The anticipated total project cost of ePIC is £20M against a cost of £17.9M approved in the original 2004 business case. The approved capital budget, and the projected capital cost of ePIC is £12.8M. Capital expenditure to end March is estimated at £11.1M with the balance required in 2010/11.

The Planning Service: Backlog in Strategic Applications

Mr J Craig asked the Minister of the Environment what steps his Department intends to take to ensure that the backlog of 111 strategic planning cases are dealt with as a matter of urgency.

(AQW 5477/10)

Minister of the Environment: The figure of 111 represents the total caseload of the Strategic Projects teams and includes applications which have only recently been submitted.

Strategic applications are in the main large scale, complex and often contentious and can take a length of time to process. I fully accept that there are a number of applications that have been in the system for a considerable time in part due to a lack of environmental information being submitted and where the Planning Service has chosen to await this rather than move to a refusal on the basis of a lack of information.

The creation of the Strategic Projects teams in October 2007 was part of the Planning Service response to the recognition that the planning system should not be an inhibitor to economic growth. They were created to specifically handle all large scale investment planning proposals including Article 31 applications and facilitate pre-application discussions (PADs). The key aim of the introduction of PADs in December 2007 is to identify key issues and obvious problems at an early stage, prior to the submission of an application and to encourage high quality applications to maximise the prospects of getting through the statutory planning process quickly leading to speedier decisions. However, the teams also inherited a number of longstanding Article 31 applications a number of which have since been processed to a decision. Nevertheless, the focus remains on reducing the number of older applications as quickly as possible.

I am acutely aware of the vital role that the Planning Service continues to play in supporting the social and economic needs of Northern Ireland and I am committed to ensuring the benefits of economic investment and job creation are realised through the timely processing of strategic applications. The two Strategic Projects teams are also committed to improving processing times and their recent performance shows positive progress.

From April 2008 to date 53 Article 31 applications have been processed by the teams and 20 other economically significant applications have been processed from April 2009 to date. These include approvals for the new Bombardier factory representing an investment of £300 million, the new eco village at Magheramourne, Larne - £100 million, the new Acute Hospital, Enniskillen - £210 million, the redevelopment of Hilden Mill, Lisburn - £100m and the redevelopment of both the Northcott and Dairy Farm Shopping Centres with a combined investment of £60m. In addition, there is the associated construction and post development employment creation.

Within the Programme for Government (PfG) there is a commitment to process large scale investment planning proposals within 6 months provided there has been PADs. To date 10 applications have met the criteria to apply the PfG target. Of these 8 have been processed on target with the remaining 2 on track for achievement, i.e. 100% record to date.

It is not possible to estimate the overall value or loss to the economy. Applicants are not required to provide financial information and figures have been included where known. Indeed, to estimate the value lost to the economy in relation to the current applications would be assuming that they would all be approvals which is unlikely to be the case. Often as noted above, time is taken to negotiate changes to an application to achieve an acceptable scheme which would otherwise be refused. Such changes may affect the initial value of a scheme.

Finally, Strategic Projects has a target of having no current applications within its control that are over 10 years old by the end of March 2010. In achieving this, it will in turn mean there will be no applications over 5 years old within the control of the Planning Service.

Planning Service: Backlog in Strategic Applications

Mr J Craig asked the Minister of the Environment for an estimate of the value lost to the economy, in relation to the backlog of applications in the Strategic Planning Service.

(AQW 5478/10)

Minister of the Environment: The figure of 111 represents the total caseload of the Strategic Projects teams and includes applications which have only recently been submitted.

Strategic applications are in the main large scale, complex and often contentious and can take a length of time to process. I fully accept that there are a number of applications that have been in the system for a considerable time in part due to a lack of environmental information being submitted and where the Planning Service has chosen to await this rather than move to a refusal on the basis of a lack of information.

The creation of the Strategic Projects teams in October 2007 was part of the Planning Service response to the recognition that the planning system should not be an inhibitor to economic growth. They were created to specifically handle all large scale investment planning proposals including Article 31 applications and facilitate pre-application discussions (PADs). The key aim of the introduction of PADs in December 2007 is to identify key issues and obvious problems at an early stage, prior to the submission of an application and to encourage high quality applications to maximise the prospects of getting through the statutory planning process quickly leading to speedier decisions. However, the teams also inherited a number of longstanding Article 31 applications a number of which have since been processed to a decision. Nevertheless, the focus remains on reducing the number of older applications as quickly as possible.

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Finally, Strategic Projects has a target of having no current applications within its control that are over 10 years old by the end of March 2010. In achieving this, it will in turn mean there will be no applications over 5 years old within the control of the Planning Service.

The Planning Service: Backlog in Strategic Applications

Mr J Craig asked the Minister of the Environment why the Strategic Planning Service has a large backlog of applications, some dating over 10 years.

(AQW 5479/10)

Minister of the Environment: The figure of 111 represents the total caseload of the Strategic Projects teams and includes applications which have only recently been submitted.

Strategic applications are in the main large scale, complex and often contentious and can take a length of time to process. I fully accept that there are a number of applications that have been in the system for a considerable time in part due to a lack of environmental information being submitted and where the Planning Service has chosen to await this rather than move to a refusal on the basis of a lack of information.

The creation of the Strategic Projects teams in October 2007 was part of the Planning Service response to the recognition that the planning system should not be an inhibitor to economic growth. They were created to specifically handle all large scale investment planning proposals including Article 31 applications and facilitate pre-application discussions (PADs). The key aim of the introduction of PADs in December 2007 is to identify key issues and obvious problems at an early stage, prior to the submission of an application and to encourage high quality applications to maximise the prospects of getting through the statutory planning process quickly leading to speedier decisions. However, the teams also inherited a number of longstanding Article 31 applications a number of which have since been processed to a decision. Nevertheless, the focus remains on reducing the number of older applications as quickly as possible.

I am acutely aware of the vital role that the Planning Service continues to play in supporting the social and economic needs of Northern Ireland and I am committed to ensuring the benefits of economic investment and job creation are realised through the timely processing of strategic applications. The two Strategic Projects teams are also committed to improving processing times and their recent performance shows positive progress.

From April 2008 to date 53 Article 31 applications have been processed by the teams and 20 other economically significant applications have been processed from April 2009 to date. These include approvals for the new Bombardier factory representing an investment of £300 million, the new eco village at Magheramourne, Larne - £100 million, the new Acute Hospital, Enniskillen - £210 million, the redevelopment of Hilden Mill, Lisburn - £100m and the redevelopment of both the Northcott and Dairy Farm Shopping Centres with a combined investment of £60m. In addition, there is the associated construction and post development employment creation.

Within the Programme for Government (PfG) there is a commitment to process large scale investment planning proposals within 6 months provided there has been PADs. To date 10 applications have met the criteria to apply the PfG target. Of these 8 have been processed on target with the remaining 2 on track for achievement, i.e. 100% record to date.

It is not possible to estimate the overall value or loss to the economy. Applicants are not required to provide financial information and figures have been included where known. Indeed, to estimate the value lost to the economy in relation to the current applications would be assuming that they would all be approvals which is unlikely to be the case. Often as noted above, time is taken to negotiate changes to an application to achieve an acceptable scheme which would otherwise be refused. Such changes may affect the initial value of a scheme.

Finally, Strategic Projects has a target of having no current applications within its control that are over 10 years old by the end of March 2010. In achieving this, it will in turn mean there will be no applications over 5 years old within the control of the Planning Service.

Breaches of Planning Regulations

Mr J Craig asked the Minister of the Environment (i) why the Planning Enforcement section is failing to enforce breaches of planning regulations; and (ii) to provide a timescale for these enforcements to be concluded.

(AQW 5480/10)

Minister of the Environment: Further to my answer to AQW 5482/10, my Department is not failing to enforce against breaches of planning control. During the last year, there have been a significant number of successful prosecutions against breaches of planning control. For example,

- In March 2010, a Co Tyrone man was fined £1,200 plus Departmental Court Costs of £13 and £75 in legal costs for the operation of a sand and gravel pit at a Magistrates' Court for continued non-compliance with a Planning Service Breach of Conditions Notice.
- In February 2010, a Carryduff man pleaded guilty and was fined £1000 along with £75 court costs and £13 legal costs at Newtownards Magistrates Court for failing to comply with an Enforcement Notice to remove an unauthorised outbuilding and all associated materials.
- In November 2009, a Co Down man was fined a total of £500, £250 Department costs and £20 court costs at Banbridge Magistrates' Court which was sitting at Newry Magistrates' Court for the breach of a Planning Service Tree Preservation Order.

The vast majority of breaches of planning control are resolved through negotiation with the owner/occupier or through the submission and consideration of a retrospective planning application.

Enforcement can be a lengthy and complex process and the time taken to achieve a satisfactory resolution varies from one case to another. As stated in Planning Service's Enforcement Strategy, my Department will aim to bring 70% of cases to target conclusion within 39 working weeks (9 months) of receipt of a complaint. For the purposes of the Enforcement Strategy, 'target conclusion' means case closure, submission of a retrospective planning application, enforcement action or summons to court.

Whilst Planning Service will work to business plan targets, the timescale in relation to the final stages of the enforcement process is largely outside my Department's control due to other statutory processes including appeals to the Planning Appeals Commission against an Enforcement Notice and/or legal proceedings and court timetables.

Planning Enforcement Section

Mr J Craig asked the Minister of the Environment how many planning cases have been passed to the Planning Enforcement section in each of the last five years; and how many of these have been enforced.

(AQW 5482/10)

Minister of the Environment: My Department is committed to maintaining up-to-date and accurate case records and to this end its existing Enforcement IT system was upgraded in 2009.

Prior to 2009, Planning Service did not retain full electronic records for Enforcement therefore, in order to provide you with accurate figures of the number of cases enforced for the time period in question, a manual check of case files would be required. This is not only disproportionate in terms of time and cost but would result in un-validated statistics being released.

	2009	2008	2007	2006	2005
Cases Opened	3938	3888	4059	4441	4033

	2009	2008	2007	2006	2005
Cases Resolved	5428	-	-	-	-
Enforcement Action :					
Notices Issued	415	-	-	-	-
Summons Issued	60	-	-	-	-

The number of enforcement cases opened in each of the last 5 years and enforced and resolved (2009) by my Department is set out in the table below.

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.

Enforcement Action is taken by my Department in accordance with the relevant legislation as set out in the Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1991. However, it should be noted that the figures provided do not include those cases whereby a breach of planning control has been resolved through negotiation with the owner/occupier or through the submission and consideration of a retrospective planning application.

Road Safety Initiative 'Live to Play'

Mr R McCartney asked the Minister of the Environment what contact his Department has had with the GAA in relation to its road safety initiative 'Live to Play'.

(AQW 5484/10)

Minister of the Environment: The Lifestyle & Wellbeing Manager in the GAA first approached DOE Road Safety in 2008 to ask for help in compiling online blogs with a road safety message aimed at their members. The GAA were keen that any message they were going to deliver would be consistent with DOE Road Safety messages. We were happy to assist and the GAA said that, in time, they hoped this would evolve into a more high profile initiative.

In January of this year, the GAA contacted DOE again to advise that they were launching the new road safety initiative 'Live to Play'.

On 30 January 2010 Ulster GAA launched the initiative at the Dr McKenna Cup Final. The launch was the first of a series of promotional initiatives which will roll out across Ulster in the coming months. Information on the website will warn of the main causal factors, speed, alcohol/drugs and inattention. My Department welcomes this initiative and we are happy to provide supporting material. We have already made arrangements for digital adverts to run on the site and have issued the organisation with recent communications relating to many of the various DOE road safety messages.

Officials and GAA representatives are meeting on the 24 March 2010 to discuss the initiative and to see how DOE can further support the activities associated with 'Live to Play'.

The current DOE Road Safety digital campaign targets many websites, including IFA and the GAA. DOE Road Safety considers all advertising and publicity approaches from relevant organisations.

Planning Enforcement Section

Mr J Craig asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of staff employed (i) currently; and (ii) in each of the last five years in the Planning Enforcement section.

(AQW 5515/10)

Minister of the Environment: The number of staff employed in each of the last five years in the Planning Service enforcement section is provided in the table below. There are also eight planning officers at PPTO (Principal Planner) grade, 6 of whom are involved with enforcement work combined with their other duties. These are included as 5 full time equivalents i.e. – 2 full time and 6 x ½ time.

	2009/10 (currently)	2008/09	2007/08	2006/07	2005/06
Number of staff employed in enforcement	50	45	39	43	34

Planning Application for Knock Golf Club in Belfast

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister of the Environment what undertakings have been made by the South Eastern Health Trust to enable the Planning Service to address issues relating to open space in the planning application for Knock Golf Club in Belfast.

(AQW 5523/10)

Minister of the Environment: Belfast Divisional Planning Office has regular meetings with the DHSSPS Health Estates Department, who act on behalf of and in support of all the local hospitals and Trusts about development proposals on various hospital sites in the Belfast Area. Discussions have taken place in relation to development of the Ulster Hospital site and the land occupied by Knock Golf Club. A planning application for the extension of the Ulster Hospital onto lands which are part of the practice area at Knock Golf Club was submitted in 2006 but later withdrawn.

Planning Service received a letter from the Director of Planning, Information and Performance Management in the Health Trust which had been sent to the Knock Golf Club on 1 February 2008 welcoming the proposed return of the lands to the Trust. That letter was copied to other officials in the Trust.

The Planning Office is currently negotiating a planning agreement under Article 40 of the Planning N.I. Order 1991 in order to ensure the delivery of the community benefits, including the return of the lands to the Trust, as proposed as part of the overall package put forward by the applicants for the development at Knock Golf Club. This Agreement is at early stages as the normal procedure is that discussions begin after Council is consulted on the application. However it will be finalised before the decision notice is issued.

Planning Applications

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister of the Environment how many planning applications were originally recommended for refusal but subsequently approved after overcoming policy issues relating to the loss of open space, broken down by Council area, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 5526/10)

Minister of the Environment: My Department does not hold centrally statistics on the number of planning applications relating to the loss of open space where a refusal opinion was changed to an approval opinion. To provide an accurate response would require manual checking of files for each Council area which could not be carried out in the time available and would also involve disproportionate costs.

Waste Tyres Site at Chapel Hill, Mayobridge

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 1605/10, for an update on the storage capacity for tyres at the approved waste tyres site at Chapel Hill, Mayobridge.

(AQW 5528/10)

Minister of the Environment: The licensed facility is permitted to accept up to 7000 tonnes of tyres at the site per year. The Northern Ireland Environment Agency regularly inspects the site and has recorded no non-compliances.

The Agency believes that unauthorised storage of tyres may be taking place outside the licensed boundary and an investigation is ongoing into possible breaches of waste legislation.

Planning Service is also investigating the unauthorised external storage of tyres at the site and has commenced enforcement action. An Enforcement Notice has issued on 5 March 2010 seeking the cessation of the importation of tyres onto this part of the site and the removal of all tyres externally stored at the site. This Notice takes effect on 8 April 2010 unless an appeal is made beforehand. At the same time, Planning Service issued a Stop Notice against the importation of further tyres onto the site and it took effect on 8 March 2010.

Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan

Ms C Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of the Environment if he has had any discussions with (i) the Minister for Social Development; and (ii) the Planning Service in relation to changing the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan zone to include social housing on the Nelson Street site.

(AQW 5539/10)

Minister of the Environment: The site in question at Nelson Street was included in the Northern Ireland Housing Executive's Social Housing Programme prior to 2004, and was subsequently zoned in the draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan (BMAP), published in November 2004. This site was zoned for social housing in draft BMAP at the request of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, and there were no objections to the proposed zoning.

A planning application to redevelop the site and provide housing comprising 48 apartments and 18 terraced houses was approved by Planning Service in January 2006. In April 2008 Planning Service received a further application seeking approval for the construction of 238 apartments. This application is currently under consideration by Planning Service. The agent has written to Planning Service stating that it is his client's intention to consider the availability of social units within the scheme in line with Planning Policy Statement 12 and BMAP.

I can confirm that I have not had any discussions with the Minister for Social Development concerning the site. Nor have I had any discussions with Planning Service. However, I have been advised that the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, for which the Minister for Social and Development is responsible, has had discussions with Planning Service, in relation to the social housing aspect of the site.

Defective Buses Carrying School Children

Mr M Storey asked the Minister of the Environment how many buses, carrying school children, have been found to be defective in each of the last three years, broken down by Council area.

(AQW 5552/10)

Minister of the Environment: The following statistics refer to buses being used to carry school children and which were subject to compliance spot checks by enforcement officers attached to the Driver & Vehicle Agency.

Owing to the manner in which the information is retained, it has only been possible to present the data by county as opposed to by council area.

PERIOD 1 APRIL 2007 TO 31 MARCH 2008

County	Vehicles Checked	Number Defective
Armagh	8	0
Fermanagh	8	0
Antrim	10	0
Londonderry	1	0
Down	105	19
Tyrone	14	0

PERIOD 1 APRIL 2008 TO 31 MARCH 2009

County	Vehicles Checked	Number Defective
Armagh	2	0
Fermanagh	0	0
Antrim	5	0
Londonderry	0	0
Down	22	0
Tyrone	0	0

PERIOD 1 APRIL 2009 TO 15 MARCH 2010

County	Vehicles Checked	Number Defective
Armagh	0	0
Fermanagh	0	0
Antrim	0	0
Londonderry	0	0
Down	24	6
Tyrone	1	1

Safety and Legal Requirements on Bus Companies

Mr M Storey asked the Minister of the Environment what safety and legal requirements are placed on bus companies (i) from Northern Ireland; and (ii) from outside Northern Ireland which service school journeys.

(AQW 5553/10)

Minister of the Environment: A Road Service Licence (RSL) is required before a bus company can provide bus services (including school services) in Northern Ireland. A RSL is issued to applicants who meet the legal requirements of being of good repute, having sufficient financial standing and having appropriate levels of professional competence. All the buses that the company owns are required to be properly maintained and insured and have public service vehicle test certificates. All drivers are required to meet all the relevant driving licence requirements. These controls give assurance that passengers will be travelling in safe vehicles with properly trained drivers.

Bus companies from outside Northern Ireland must meet all the statutory requirements for the country they are registered in and hold a Community Licence to allow them to operate in Northern Ireland.

Planning Applications in the East Antrim Constituency

Mr R Beggs asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 5016/10, to list the planning applications in the East Antrim constituency in relation to which his predecessor Mr Sammy Wilson (i) made supportive representations; (ii) objected; and (iii) indicated no preference during his tenure as Environment Minister.

(AQW 5567/10)

Minister of the Environment: I have attached a list drawn up from my Department's records of all planning applications on which Sammy Wilson MP MLA made representations to the Planning Service in relation to his East Antrim constituency during his tenure as Environment Minister. The list includes details of correspondence where it relates to specific planning applications and to applications

discussed in office meetings with the Divisional Planning Manager. The applications are open to public scrutiny by request to the appropriate Divisional Planning Office.

PPS 18

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on PPS 18 and any associated Supplementary Planning Guidance.

(AQW 5595/10)

Minister of the Environment: I will shortly receive from my officials in NIEA a new version of the Supplementary Planning Guidelines which has been revised to take account of comments received during the consultation on PPS18.

PPS 18 Supplementary Planning Guidance

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of the Environment what criteria were used to award the contract for PPS 18 Supplementary Planning Guidance; and why those awarded were successful above other applicants.

(AQW 5596/10)

Minister of the Environment: The criteria used in the evaluation of the contract were:

- Methodology and Understanding of the Requirement;
- Relevant Experience of the Service Provider and Personnel; and
- Study Timetable.

The company selected had the highest total score against these criteria. The tender documents clearly showed that the company to whom the contract was awarded has longstanding experience in landscape assessment. This included landscape and visual impact assessments of major wind farm projects for developers. NIEA was therefore confident that this company would take a professional and balanced approach to the contract it was awarding.

Planning Application Fee

Mrs N Long asked the Minister of the Environment if a new start-up business can stagger the payment of a planning application fee when the application is for a change of use.

(AQW 5598/10)

Minister of the Environment: Regulation 3 of the Planning (Fees) Regulations (NI) 2005 requires that where an application for planning permission or approval of reserved matters is made to the Department, a fee for that application will be paid in accordance with the provisions of the Regulations. There is no provision within the current legislation to stagger the payment of a planning application fee for a change of use application or any other application.

Vehicles Clamped or Seized

Mr D Hilditch asked the Minister of the Environment how many vehicles have been (i) clamped; or (ii) seized in the last 12 months, in the Larne area.

(AQW 5663/10)

Minister of the Environment: The number of vehicles clamped or seized in the last 12 months in the Larne area was 77.

Supplementary Planning Guidance on Wind Energy Development

Mr D Kinahan asked the Minister of the Environment when the Supplementary Planning Guidance on wind energy development will be completed and if he will make a statement on this issue.

(AQW 5673/10)

Minister of the Environment: I will shortly receive from my officials in NIEA a new version of the Supplementary Planning Guidance which has been revised to take account of comments received during the consultation on PPS18. I will carefully consider this document and announce my decision at a later date.

20mph Speed Limit

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of the Environment what discussions he has had with the Minister of Regional Development in relation to the 20mph speed limit, as part the Road Safety Strategy.
(AQW 5698/10)

Minister of the Environment: In my Statement to the Assembly on 15 March 2010, I explained how the proposals in the document, now out for consultation, were developed. My officials worked closely with road safety partners in developing the consultation paper. This included counterparts in the Department for Regional Development, particularly with regard to those commitments that fall to that department, which included measures relating to the 20mph speed limit.

All measures included in the draft consultation paper were agreed and approved by the Road Safety Strategy Project Board, established to oversee the development of a new strategy, of which the Department for Regional Development is a member. On the paper being presented to me, I provided it to all Executive colleagues for consideration.

The Regional Development Minister responded to confirm that he was content with the overall direction and thrust of the proposed new road safety strategy and the proposed action measures as reflected in the consultation document. The paper was subsequently agreed at the Executive meeting of 25 February 2010.

Roads Safety Strategy

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of the Environment what discussions he has had with the PSNI in relation to additional average speed cameras, as part of the Roads Safety Strategy.
(AQW 5699/10)

Minister of the Environment: In my Statement to the Assembly on 15 March 2010, I explained how the proposals in the document, now out for consultation, were developed. My officials worked closely with road safety partners in developing the consultation paper. This included counterparts in the PSNI, particularly with regard to those commitments that fall to the police, including measures relating to average speed cameras.

All measures included in the draft consultation paper were agreed and approved by the Road Safety Strategy Project Board, established to oversee the development of a new strategy, of which PSNI is a member. On the paper being presented to me, I wrote to the appropriate Assistant Chief Constable who responded with his assurance of the PSNI's support for the contents of the consultation paper.

Planning Service Running Costs in Ards and Downpatrick

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the annual running costs of the Planning Service in the Ards and Downpatrick areas in each of the last three years.
(AQW 5715/10)

Minister of the Environment: The annual running costs of the Downpatrick Divisional office of the Planning Service in each of the last three years was as follows:

2006/07	£2,903,417
2007/08	£2,881,473
2008/09	£3,270,161

Information on running costs is only available at Divisional level and not by council area. The Downpatrick Divisional office processes planning applications for the Down, Lisburn, North Down and Ards council areas.

George Best Belfast City Airport

Ms D Purvis asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 5315/10 and AQW 5124/10, (i) whether he is still considering the request from George Best Belfast City Airport to lift the 'Seats for Sale' limit in its planning agreement; (ii) whether he has received legal advice in relation to this request; and (iii) if this advice will be published.

(AQW 5726/10)

Minister of the Environment: My Department has concluded that George Best Belfast City Airport (GBBCA) may not apply to modify the Agreement prior to the expiry of the relevant period on 14 October 2013. However, my Department may remove the restriction at any time if it has good reason to do so. This view is based on legal advice.

It is normal practice not to release legal advice and I see no reason for departing from this practice in this case.

Planning Applications

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of the Environment to list all planning applications for the North Antrim constituency that have been completed by the Strategic Projects Unit since its inception.

(AQW 5727/10)

Minister of the Environment: The following tables set out the applications completed and those currently being processed by the Strategic Projects teams for the North Antrim constituency area.

APPLICATIONS COMPLETED

Reference Number	Description
E/2002/0065/F	Giant's Causeway World Heritage Visitors Centre
E/2008/0065/F	Replacement Visitors Centre, Giant's Causeway, Bushmills
G/2009/0205/F	Extension and refurbishment of Sainsbury's store Braidwater Retail Park, Ballymena
E/2009/0161/LB	Alteration and extension to the Causeway Hotel (listed building consent)
E/2009/0162/F	Alteration and extension to the Causeway Hotel
E/2009/0239/F	Giant's Causeway variable message sign

APPLICATIONS CURRENTLY BEING PROCESSED INCLUDING TIMESCALES

Reference number	Description	Processing time to date
E/2007/0075/F	Proposed Golf Resort, Runkerry, Bushmills	25 months
E/2009/0238/F	Giant's Causeway variable message sign	8 months
E/2009/0240/F	Giant's Causeway variable message sign	8 months
E/2009/0241/F	Giant's Causeway variable message sign	8 months

Reference number	Description	Processing time to date
E/2009/0354/F	Giant's Causeway variable message sign	4 months

Planning Applications

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of the Environment to list all planning applications for the North Antrim constituency that are currently being dealt with by the Strategic Projects Unit, including the length of time taken for each application to be processed.

(AQW 5729/10)

Minister of the Environment: The following tables set out the applications completed and those currently being processed by the Strategic Projects teams for the North Antrim constituency area.

APPLICATIONS COMPLETED

Reference Number	Description
E/2002/0065/F	Giant's Causeway World Heritage Visitors Centre
E/2008/0065/F	Replacement Visitors Centre, Giant's Causeway, Bushmills
G/2009/0205/F	Extension and refurbishment of Sainsbury's store Braidwater Retail Park, Ballymena
E/2009/0161/LB	Alteration and extension to the Causeway Hotel (listed building consent)
E/2009/0162/F	Alteration and extension to the Causeway Hotel
E/2009/0239/F	Giant's Causeway variable message sign

APPLICATIONS CURRENTLY BEING PROCESSED INCLUDING TIMESCALES

Reference number	Description	Processing time to date
E/2007/0075/F	Proposed Golf Resort, Runkerry, Bushmills	25 months
E/2009/0238/F	Giant's Causeway variable message sign	8 months
E/2009/0240/F	Giant's Causeway variable message sign	8 months
E/2009/0241/F	Giant's Causeway variable message sign	8 months
E/2009/0354/F	Giant's Causeway variable message sign	4 months

Planning Applications

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment how much revenue was generated through planning applications in the Ards and Downpatrick areas, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 5747/10)

Minister of the Environment: The revenue generated through planning applications in the Downpatrick Divisional office in each of the last three years was as follows:

2006/07	£2,805,400
2007/08	£3,207,551
2008/09	£2,635,934

Income information is only available at Divisional level and not by council area. The Downpatrick Divisional office processes planning applications for the Down, Lisburn, North Down and Ards council areas.

Hanwood Trust Company Limited

Mr D Kinahan asked the Minister of the Environment to list the planning applications that the Hanwood Trust Company Limited has (i) submitted; (ii) supported; (iii) opposed; and (iv) otherwise communicated with the Planning service about in the (i) Castlereagh; (ii) Belfast; (iii) North Down; and (iv) Ards areas. **(AQW 5758/10)**

Minister of the Environment: I have attached a list drawn up from my Department's records of planning applications received from Hanwood Trust Company Ltd. The list includes the correspondence received from Hanwood Trust Company Ltd.

AQW 5758/10 – APPLICATIONS

Reference	Site Address	Proposal	Decision
Y/2002/0392/F	Tullycarnet Resource Centre, Kinross Avenue, Tullycarnet.	Petrol Station with shops and retail units, start-up business units, professional services retail units, junior pitch and 7-a side	Approved 28/02/2006
Y/2003/0052/F	Tullycarnet Resource Centre, Kinross Avenue, Tullycarnet.	Construction of children's playground, extension to resource centre for IT training, changing rooms and car parking.	Approved 6/08/2003
Y/2006/0481/F	Tullycarnet Resource Centre, Kinross Avenue, Tullycarnet, Belfast	Junior grass pitch, full size synthetic pitch, petrol station with shop and retail units, start-up business units.	Approved 22/11/2006
Y/2009/0057/A	Hanwood Business Park, Old Dundonald Road, Belfast BT16 1DL	Erection of entrance sign	Consent 27/04/2009

AQW 5758/10 REPRESENTATION RECEIVED.

Reference	Site Address	Proposal	Type
Z/2006/0599/0	Land at Knock Golf Club, Upper Newtownards Road, Belfast	Development at Knock Golf course incorporating a residential development (revised scheme) with access to Stoney Road, car parking, formal and informal open space, the retention of a 9-hole golf course and conversion of existing clubhouse to community use	Letter of support

Proposed Incinerator at Glenavy

Mr C Boylan asked the Minister of the Environment whether he has considered holding a public inquiry in relation to the proposed incinerator at Glenavy, given the Environment Committee's support for such an inquiry and the controversy surrounding the proposals.

(AQW 5872/10)

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 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.

Wildlife and Natural Environment Bill

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of the Environment what consultation his Department has had with the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development in relation to the Wildlife and Natural Environment Bill.

(AQW 5876/10)

Minister of the Environment: My Department has consulted regularly with the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) on issues contained in the Wildlife and Natural Environment Bill which relate to DARD's area of responsibility. These issues include powers within DARD's Forestry Bill to protect woodland from damage by deer and certain other wild animals. Discussions have also taken place on the regulation of the use of snares and traps as DARD brings forward its Welfare of Animals Bill.

Department of Finance and Personnel

Chief Executive and Chairperson of Non-departmental Public Bodies

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the salary and expenses claimed by the Chief Executive and Chairperson of each non-departmental public body in each of the last three years.

(AQW 4762/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr S Wilson): Salary information for Chief Executives and Chairpersons of non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs) sponsored by the Northern Ireland departments, is available in the annual Public Bodies report (with the exception of Health and Social Care Trusts).

Public Bodies reports covering financial years 2006/07, 2007/08, and 2008/09 can be obtained from the Assembly library or alternatively can be downloaded as follows:-

- Public Bodies 2007 - http://www.dfpni.gov.uk/public_bodies_2007-4.doc
- Public Bodies 2008 - http://www.dfpni.gov.uk/public_bodies_2008-6.doc
- Public Bodies 2009 - http://www.dfpni.gov.uk/public_bodies_2009__2_-8.pdf

The 2009 report refers to the 2008/09 financial year, which is the most recent information available.

Salary information in relation to Health and Social Care Trusts can be obtained through the links in Annex A, while information on expenses is contained in Annex B.

Several bodies, including public corporations, special agencies and other bodies, which are not strictly NDPBs, have also been included, as they are listed in the annual Public Bodies report.

Annex A

Belfast HSC Trust

- www.belfasttrust.hscni.net/pubinfo/Annual_Report_2007-08.pdf
- www.belfasttrust.hscni.net/pubinfo/Annual_Report_2008-09.pdf

Western HSC Trust

- www.westerntrust.hscni.net/corporate/Our%20Priorities%20and%20How%20We%20Are%20Doing/Annual%20Report%202007-08.pdf
- www.westerntrust.hscni.net/corporate/Our%20Priorities%20and%20How%20We%20Are%20Doing/Annual%20Report%202008-09.pdf

South Eastern HSC Trust

- www.setrust.hscni.net/pubinfo/Annual_Report_07-08.pdf
- www.setrust.hscni.net/pubinfo/Annual_Report_08-09.pdf

Southern HSC Trust

- www.southerntrust.hscni.net/corporate/spend/Annual%20Report%202007-08.pdf
- www.southerntrust.hscni.net/pubinfo/Annual%20Report%202008%20-%202009.pdf

Northern HSC Trust

- www.northerntrust.hscni.net/pdf/Annual_Report_07_08.pdf
- www.northerntrust.hscni.net/pdf/Annual_Report_08-09.pdf

NI Ambulance HSC Trust

- www.niamb.co.uk/docs/documents/annual_reports/annual_report_06_07.pdf

- www.niamb.co.uk/docs/documents/annual_reports/annual_report_07_08.pdf
- www.niamb.co.uk/docs/documents/08833%20NIAS%20Annual%20Report.pdf

Annex B

CHAIRPERSON AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE EXPENSES

	Chairperson (or equivalent)			Chief Executive (or equivalent)		
	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
DFP						
Northern Ireland Building Regulations Advisory Committee	Nil	Nil	Nil	N/A	N/A	N/A
Statistics Advisory Committee	Nil	Nil	Nil	N/A	N/A	N/A
OFMDFM						
Advisory Council on Infrastructure Investment	1557	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Commissioner for Children & Young People	985^	1317^	1067^	Nil	Nil	546
Economic Research Institute of Northern Ireland	1388	410	Nil	1146	222	189
ILEX Urban Regeneration Company	1290	4974	23470	1405	2875	3048
Planning Appeals Commission / Water Appeals Commission	1117^	788^	913^	N/A	N/A	N/A
Statute Law Committee	Nil	Nil	Nil	N/A	N/A	N/A
Strategic Investment Board	6042	5443	3352	24057	22228	14013
Commission for Victims and Survivors	N/A	Nil	Nil	N/A	Nil	Nil
Older Peoples Advocate	N/A	N/A	79	N/A	N/A	N/A
DCAL						
Arts Council Northern Ireland	624	1553	253	1715	1670	1213
Fisheries Conservancy Board	290	701	876	1290	2938	2501

	Chairperson (or equivalent)			Chief Executive (or equivalent)		
	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
National Museums Northern Ireland	Nil	Nil	Nil	1895	1171	2033
Northern Ireland Museums Council	Nil	778	357	3384#	1549#	1267#
Sport Northern Ireland	8124	5746	719	6919	3233	3130
DOE						
NI Local Government Officers' Superannuation Committee	911	38	728	4860***	5285***	4821***
Local Government Staff Commission (LGSC)	872	892	930	1088	2174	1935
Historic Monuments Council (HMC)	737	1046	1143	N/A	N/A	N/A
Historic Buildings Council (HBC)	741	913	838	N/A	N/A	N/A
Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside (CNCC)	7145	5728	3632	N/A	N/A	N/A
DARD						
Drainage Council (DC)	120	120	120	N/A	N/A	N/A
Pig Production Development Committee (PPDC)	105	10	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Research and Education Advisory Panel (REAP)	171	236	32	N/A	N/A	N/A
Agricultural Wages Board (AWB)	82	131	224	N/A	N/A	N/A
NI Fishery Harbour Authority (NIFHA)	497	478	390	1740	2095	1808
Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Livestock and Meat Commission for NI (LMC)	220	324	94	2854	2884	2468
DRD						

	Chairperson (or equivalent)			Chief Executive (or equivalent)		
	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Northern Ireland Transport Holding Company	2654	1154	1209	Nil	Nil	Nil
Northern Ireland Water	N/A	2600	23419	Nil	Nil	Nil
DENI						
Belfast Education & Library Board	31	Nil	Nil	1589	2136	1786
North Eastern Education & Library Board	5245	2645	2048	2858	1953	2399
South Eastern Education & Library Board	7107	5010	4244	1023	1816	2741
Southern Education & Library Board	1647	2187	1748	Nil	Nil	Nil
Western Education & Library Board	2857	Nil	2674	3542	5171	3907
Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment	1515	3599	2287	1867	1643	1406
Staff Commission	64	131	122	1447	1308	1559
CCMS	Nil	Nil	Nil	6391	4836	6563
Youth Council	792	625	314	1729	1708	1090
DSD						
Northern Ireland Housing Executive	2587	3433	7843	1443	1553	1929
Laganside*						
DETI						
Invest NI	Nil	Nil	4298	5592	4480	8766
Northern Ireland Tourist Board	2065	1868	1809	4677	5515	4952
Health & Safety Executive NI	1060	1379	678	616	650	749
General Consumer Council NI	268	Nil	324	3355	3567	4728
DEL						
Industrial Court	341	464	72	N/A	N/A	N/A

	Chairperson (or equivalent)			Chief Executive (or equivalent)		
	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Construction Industry Training Board	1716	2116	156	1102	1520	2405
Ulster Supported Employment Limited	922	864	806	1207	1507	1649
Labour Relations Agency	407	1177	542	336	1115	1589
Enterprise Ulster	**	**	N/A	**	**	N/A
Fair Employment Tribunal	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Industrial Tribunal	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
DHSSPS****						
Belfast HSC Trust	N/A	3093	713	N/A	1897	1955
Western HSC Trust	N/A	719	1627	N/A	2961	1636
South Eastern HSC Trust	N/A	1052	383	N/A	642	2416
Southern HSC Trust	N/A	6299	3734	N/A	8421	2767
Northern HSC Trust	N/A	5116	5385	N/A	3810	4518
NI Ambulance HSC Trust	251	681	1183	3843	2457	3397
NI Practice and Education Council	0	0	0	1868	1106	1297
NI Medical and Dental Training Agency	2980	1776	1924	11408	11083	12129
NI Social Care Council	24	0	0	2991	1962	2291
NI Fire and Rescue Service	6199	5602	5606	689	868	1603
NI Guardian Ad Litem Agency	682	389	381	2626	1748	1555
NI Blood Transfusion Service	0	0	0	1774	2463	704
Care Tribunal	714	139	452	N/A	N/A	N/A
NI Clinical Excellence Awards Committee	154	614	79	N/A	N/A	N/A
RQIA	945	465	675	N/A	N/A	433

Refers to Director

- * Not possible to provide information within the timeframe.
- ** Accounts for the Financial Years 2006/07 & 2007/08 contain an overall remuneration figure. There is no breakdown in relation to expenses.
- *** Refers to Secretary
- ^ Refers to Commissioner/Chief Commissioner
- **** DHSSPS has not included Information for organisations which were in existence before RPA, as this would not be directly comparable and in the case of the Trusts would not be readily available.

Lone Pensioner Allowance

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many Lone Pensioner Allowance awards have been made in this financial year to date, broken down by District Council area.

(AQW 5362/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: As of 28 February 2010, there are 25,709 current awards of Lone Pensioner Allowance (LPA). 6,061 of these are new awards of LPA in the period 01 April 2009 – 28 February 2010.

Land & Property Services administers 20,461 current LPA awards to home owners, including 4,556 new awards in the current financial year to date. A breakdown of the number of awards made in each district council area, and their value, is set out in Table 1.

Awards of LPA for ratepayers in the social and private rented sectors are made by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. The Executive has 5,248 current awards under the scheme, including 1,505 new awards in the current financial year. The Executive is able to supply details by district council but is not currently able to break down the value of the awards by council area. The NIHE figures are shown in Table 2.

Work is in hand to enable supply of values by district council, and LPS and NIHE plan to provide LPA figures on the web, on a quarterly basis, during 2010-11.

The structures of the LPS and NIHE ratepayer records mean that recording is to district council and not to Parliamentary constituencies.

TABLE 1

LAND AND PROPERTY SERVICES AWARDS OF LPA

LPS awards by council area	No of current awards	Total value of current awards	No of new awards made 01/04/09 – 28/02/10	Total value of new awards made 01/04/09 – 28/02/10
Antrim	472	£78,276	107	£18,518
Ards	1070	£192,031	235	£47,881
Armagh	607	£98,312	149	£27,249
Ballymena	808	£138,416	184	£40,670
Ballymoney	290	£47,528	73	£14,126
Banbridge	398	£61,285	107	£18,980
Belfast	3667	£690,369	712	£140,911
Carrickfergus	550	£92,629	119	£24,446
Castlereagh	1391	£219,184	242	£42,982

LPS awards by council area	No of current awards	Total value of current awards	No of new awards made 01/04/09 – 28/02/10	Total value of new awards made 01/04/09 – 28/02/10
Coleraine	847	£154,565	180	£37,549
Cookstown	229	£35,267	66	£11,765
Craigavon	773	£115,017	201	£30,204
Derry	717	£128,040	190	£39,325
Down	783	£144,315	201	£46,833
Dungannon & South Tyrone	386	£57,232	93	£15,706
Fermanagh	590	£84,250	121	£19,277
Larne	476	£66,437	112	£17,572
Limavady	218	£36,156	65	£12,046
Lisburn	1385	£235,796	303	£61,482
Magherafelt	267	£37,879	82	£12,688
Moyle	205	£37,485	59	£11,469
Newry & Mourne	702	£124,662	170	£36,767
Newtownabbey	1237	£186,948	297	£50,304
North Down	1727	£341,387	314	£73,806
Omagh	419	£63,768	105	£19,724
Strabane	247	£34,397	69	£10,083
Total	20,461	£3,501,631	4,556	£882,363

TABLE 2
NIHE AWARDS OF LPA

NIHE awards by region	No of current awards	
Antrim	136	
Ards	270	
Armagh	153	
Ballymena	244	
Ballymoney	75	
Banbridge	141	
Belfast	914	
Carrickfergus	201	
Castlereagh	285	
Coleraine	222	
Cookstown	55	
Craigavon	271	
Derry	198	
Down	179	
Dungannon & South Tyrone	87	
Fermanagh	129	
Larne	139	
Limavady	52	
Lisburn	407	
Magherafelt	68	
Moyle	51	
Newry & Mourne	143	
Newtownabbey	332	
North Down	352	
Omagh	87	
Strabane	57	
	Total	Total value of current awards
	5,248	£453,502

Departmental Posts: Relocation and Decentralisation

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what consideration he has given to posts within his Department that could be relocated or decentralised.

(AQW 5441/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: At present I have no firm plans for any relocation or decentralisation of posts within the Department of Finance & Personnel.

Staff Grievances by Civil Servants

Mr A McQuillan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to AQW 4516/10, if it was normal practice, prior to the introduction of HR Connect, not to record the amount of compensation paid to staff who had their grievances upheld.

(AQW 5483/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: Pursuant to AQW 4516/10, I can confirm that prior to HRConnect it was not normal practice to record the amount of compensation paid to staff who had their grievances upheld. I can also confirm that since 2007, when records of such payments were introduced through the HR Connect system, that no compensation was paid to staff who had a grievance upheld.

Staff Grievances by Civil Servants

Mr A McQuillan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to AQW 4516/10, if it was normal practice for each Department's Personnel section to record all the details requested, prior to the introduction of HR Connect.

(AQW 5503/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: Pursuant to AQW 4516/10, prior to the introduction of HRConnect the recording of the details requested varied throughout Departments. Due to differing recording methods in Departments, not all Personnel sections held all the details requested.

Staff Grievances by Civil Servants

Mr A McQuillan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to AQW 4516/10, what other policies and procedures are in place to limit costly grievance procedures being taken by staff.

(AQW 5506/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: There are no other policies and procedures in place to limit costly grievances being taken by staff. The Northern Ireland Civil Service grievance policy complies with the statutory procedures. Within the grievance policy there are both informal and formal procedures to deal with the grievance in order to resolve at the earliest opportunity.

Pleural Plaques

Ms D Purvis asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on the progress of legislation to allow people with Pleural Plaques to claim compensation.

(AQW 5538/10)

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.

Staff Grievances by Civil Servants

Mr A McQuillan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to AQW 4516/10, if these figures show that no payments were made to staff who had a grievance upheld.

(AQW 5559/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: Pursuant to AQW 4516/10, the figures show that from October 2007 when HRConnect was introduced, there were no payments made to staff who had a grievance upheld.

Equal Pay Agreement

Mr P Butler asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether Assembly staff will be entitled to avail of the Equal Pay agreement recently agreed between his Department and NIPSA.

(AQW 5563/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: Employees of the Northern Ireland Civil Service seconded to the Assembly will be included in the terms of the equal pay settlement for the period that NICS determined their pay, provided all other eligibility criteria are met. Direct recruits to the Assembly are not included in the settlement as the NICS does not determine their pay.

Subcontractors Employed on Public Procurement Projects

Ms M Anderson asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what measures are in place to ensure that proper terms and conditions are offered to subcontractors employed on public procurement projects.

(AQW 5565/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The NEC3 form of contract, adopted by Central Procurement Directorate (CPD) for all construction works and services contracts, complies fully with the 'Achieving Excellence in Construction' principles of collaboration, partnership and team working. It requires the main contractor to use NEC3 subcontracts, with terms that are consistent with the main contract, or to seek the prior approval of the Project Manager if other forms of subcontract are proposed.

CPD, the Centres of Procurement Expertise and the Construction Industry Group for Northern Ireland have agreed further measures aimed at improving payment progress to subcontractors.

These actions, developed in response to the Construction Industry Forum for Northern Ireland Procurement Task Group Report, mean that in new construction works contracts tendered after 1 March 2010:-

- the main contractor will be required to comply with a revised 'Code of Practice for Government Construction Clients and their Supply Chains' which includes a 'Fair Payment' Charter;
- payment to subcontractors will be a standing item on the agenda at project meetings;
- the main contractor will provide a report to the Project Manager on payments made to subcontractors at each project meeting; and
- the Project Manager will carry out periodic checks with subcontractors on the payment performance of the main contractor.

Supplies and services contracts also require main contractors to enter into subcontracts on the same terms and conditions as the main contract. CPD is currently considering if the approach taken in construction contracts would be practicable in supplies and services contracts.

Rate Relief

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many people aged 65 and over are currently in receipt of rate relief, broken down by religious background.

(AQW 5652/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: As of 15 March 2010, there were 7,184 people aged 65 and over, or with a partner aged 65 or over, in receipt of rate relief. My Department does not hold any records of claimants' religious background.

Current and Capital Funding

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how much has been distributed during the in-year monitoring rounds in both current and capital funding since May 2007, broken down by Department.

(AQW 5656/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: Additional funding distributed to departments through the in-year monitoring process, since May 2007 is summarised in the attached table.

This included funding in respect of the Secretary of State's Priority Funding Packages in 2007-08, and Integrated Development Funding in all years.

£ MILLION

Department	Current Expenditure	Capital Investment
DARD	38.0	27.9
DCAL	8.1	10.0
DE	82.7	33.0
DEL	14.4	7.1
DETI	10.1	4.2
DFP	51.2	26.6
DHSSPS	65.3	14.7
DOE	24.2	8.5
DRD	150.3	169.3
DSD	105.9	185.4
OFMDFM	5.8	
AOCC ¹	0.1	0.0
NIA	3.1	3.4
NIAO	0.4	0.1
NIAUR		0.1
FSA ¹		0.0
Total²	559.4	490.2

1. £0.0 million represents allocations of less than £50,000
2. Totals may not add due to roundings

Lone Pensioner Allowance

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many successful applications have been made for the Lone Pensioner rates relief allowance from people living in the South Antrim constituency since it was introduced; and the total value of these awards.

(AQW 5684/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: Land & Property Services administers (LPS) Lone Pensioners' Allowance (LPA) for home owners. The structures of the LPS ratepayer records mean that recording is to District Council area and not to Parliamentary constituencies.

The significant district council areas within the South Antrim parliamentary constituency are Antrim and Newtownabbey, and a breakdown of the number of awards made to home owners in each district council area, and their value, is set out in the table below.

	No. of awards 2008/09	Value of awards 2008/09	No. of awards 2009/10	Value of awards 2009/10
Antrim	406	£59,798	472	£78,276
Newtownabbey	1,026	£145,406	1237	£186,948

Awards of LPA for ratepayers in the social and private rented sectors are made by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. The Executive is able to supply details of the number of applications by district council, for the current year only, but is not presently able to break down the value of the awards by council area. The Executive has made 5,248 LPA awards in 2009-10 with a value of £453,502, averaging £86 per award. There have been 136 awards made for the Antrim council area and 332 for the Newtownabbey council area in the 2009/10 to date.

Work is in hand to enable supply of values by district council, and LPS and NIHE plan to provide LPA figures on the web, on a quarterly basis, during 2010-11.

Staff Grievances by Civil Servants

Mr A McQuillan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to AQW 4516/10, if he can confirm that no compensation was paid to any member of staff who had a grievance upheld during the period specified.

(AQW 5690/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: Pursuant to AQW 4516/10, I can confirm that prior to HRConnect it was not normal practice to record the amount of compensation paid to staff who had their grievances upheld. I can also confirm that since 2007, when records of such payments were introduced through the HR Connect system, that no compensation was paid to staff who had a grievance upheld.

2011 Census

Mr B McElduff asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel if he will include a question in the 2011 census inviting citizens to state their future constitutional preference.

(AQW 5700/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The proposed content of the 2011 Census has been developed through a detailed consultation and question testing process over recent years, which is now complete. The Census is designed to examine the socio-economic characteristics of the population rather than specific political opinion. Topics considered for inclusion have focussed on those that provide information essential for public service provision; and are required either for small geographic areas or small subgroups of the population. The content of the Census is also shaped by the requirements of Regulation (EC) No 763/2008 of the European Parliament and of the Council of the European Union that requires the provision of statistical information for small geographic areas across Europe.

Senior Civil Servants' Pay

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel if he plans to freeze the pay of senior civil servants; and to outline the total expected savings this would generate annually.

(AQW 5717/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: I have not made any decisions yet on the 2010 pay award for senior civil servants. The savings that would be generated as a result of a pay freeze could only be estimated by comparison with what the pay award would otherwise have been. As no decision has been taken on an award for 2010, and no previously agreed pay award is in place, it is not possible to estimate the level of savings that would result from a pay freeze.

Deaths from Multiple Sclerosis

Mr M Storey asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel the number of deaths in each of the last three years in which Multiple Sclerosis was a contributory factor.

(AQW 5754/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The table below provides the registered number of deaths with a mention of multiple sclerosis¹ in Northern Ireland, 2006 to 2009 Quarter 1 – Quarter 3^P.

Registration Year	Deaths with mention of multiple sclerosis
2006	51
2007	51
2008	64
2009 Q1-Q3 ^P	45

1 Multiple sclerosis is defined using the International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision (ICD10) code G35. Deaths were included where multiple sclerosis was mentioned anywhere on the death certificate.

P rovisional data.

Lone Pensioner Allowance

Mr J Craig asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many awards of Lone Pensioner Allowance have been made in the Lagan Valley Constituency; and the total value of these awards to date.

(AQW 5757/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: Land & Property Services administers (LPS) Lone Pensioners' Allowance (LPA) for home owners. The structures of the LPS ratepayer records mean that recording is to District Council area and not to Parliamentary constituencies.

The significant district council area within the Lagan Valley parliamentary constituency is Lisburn, and a breakdown of the number of awards made to home owners in Lisburn district council area, and their value, is set out in the table below.

	No. of awards 2008/09	Value of awards 2008/09	No. of awards 2009/10	Value of awards 2009/10
Lisburn	1,170	£179,822	1385	£235,796

Awards of LPA for ratepayers in the social and private rented sectors are made by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. The Executive is able to supply details of the number of applications by district council, for the current year only, but is not presently able to break down the value of the awards by council area. The Executive has made 5,248 LPA awards in 2009-10 with a value of £453,502, averaging £86 per award. There have been 407 awards made for the Lisburn council area in the 2009/10 to date.

Work is in hand to enable supply of values by district council, and LPS and NIHE plan to provide LPA figures on the web, on a quarterly basis, during 2010-11.

Belfast City Airport

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of the economic benefits to Northern Ireland of Belfast City Airport.

(AQW 5871/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The provision of a modern and efficient transport network is critically important to regional economic growth. Clearly a competitive, efficient airport infrastructure is an important part of the wider local transport network.

There are a number of economic benefits associated with Belfast City Airport that are worth highlighting. In addition to obvious benefits such as reductions in commuting time, inter-airport fare competition and employment opportunities in East Belfast and beyond, the existence of George Best Belfast City Airport actively reinforces the image of Northern Ireland as an outward-looking region.

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Out-of-Hours Services in the Western Health and Social Care Trust

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the potential impact on mortality rates of a reduction in Out-of-Hours services in the Western Health and Social Care Trust area.

(AQW 5393/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Mr M McGimpsey): I am advised that the proposed operational changes will have minimal impact for patients in terms of access to the out of hours service. Patients will continue to be seen within the timescales as set out in the Northern Ireland Quality Standards.

Out-of-Hours Services in the Western Health and Social Care Trust

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline (i) the projected impact that a reduction in Out-of-Hours services in the Western Health and Social Care Trust might have on emergency call-outs for the Ambulance Service; (ii) the projected savings that will be made by Western Urgent Care by reducing the Out-of-Hours service; and (iii) the projected cost to the Ambulance Service of this reduction.

(AQW 5394/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: There will be no reduction in Out-of-Hours services in the Western Health and Social Care Trust area. It is not envisaged that any of the proposed changes to the service will have any impact on emergency call-outs or costs relating to the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service.

The Western HSC Trust has advised that projected savings from this proposal will be £500k in the 2010/11 year with equivalent full year savings of £600k thereafter.

It is the Trust's expectation that patients will continue to be seen within the timescales set out in the NI Quality Standards. For urgent face to face consultations, this is within 1 hour, with less urgent being within 2 hours and routine being within 6 hours of initial triage.

Out-of-Hours Service, Limavady

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the impact on patient recovery of a minimum twenty minute waiting time under the Out-of-Hours service for a doctor to attend an emergency call-out in Limavady.

(AQW 5395/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: All Out of Hours service providers in Northern Ireland are required to provide the service within the context of the regionally agreed access target framework.

Whether applied in Limavady, or any other part of Northern Ireland, the access targets help underpin a safe, appropriately responsive and quality service being provided to patients. The response is based appropriately on patient need, and the degree of urgency.

2006 Caring for Carers Strategy

Mr C McDevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if there are any plans to strengthen the 2006 Caring for Carers Strategy to ensure that statutory bodies have a mandatory requirement to meet the needs of young carers.

(AQW 5396/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: It is the policy of the Department to treat all children who are providing care as children first and carers second. Where children are under 16 and providing care, Trusts already have a statutory obligation to ensure their needs are assessed, and services provided, under the provisions of the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995.

16 or 17 year olds may be assessed by Trusts, if requested to do so, either under the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 or the Carers and Direct Payments Act (Northern Ireland) 2002.

My Department has allocated funding to put in place support services for young carers which includes services to improve young carers' access to and support in education, and also awareness raising for young carers about the specific conditions of the 'cared for' person in their family.

Waiting Times for Outpatient Appointments or Diagnostic Tests

Mr C McDevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if any patients had to wait longer than the 9 week target set in 2009 for their first outpatient appointment or diagnostic test; and if any patients awaiting treatment had to wait longer than the targeted 13 week waiting period.

(AQW 5402/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The number of patients that waited longer than (i) 9 weeks for their first outpatient appointment; (ii) 9 weeks for a selected diagnostic test and (iii) 13 weeks for inpatient admission, at 31st March 2009, was published in the Northern Ireland Waiting List Bulletin for March 2009, which can be found at the following link:

http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/stats_research/stats-activity_stats-2/waiting_times/waiting_times-2.htm#waitinglist

Inpatient Admissions

Mr C McDevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many in-patient admissions there were per 1000 population in (i) 2006/07; (ii) 2007/08; and (iii) 2008-2009.

(AQW 5403/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The number of in-patient admissions per 1000 population during (i) 2006/07; (ii) 2007/08 and (iii) 2008/09 are detailed in the following table:-

Year	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Inpatient Admissions per 1000 Population	163	168	170

Source:- Hospital Inpatient System

Figures shown in the table exclude regular day/night admissions. The number of inpatient admissions relates to those patients admitted electively and as an emergency.

Note:- Deaths and discharges have been used to approximate admissions. These figures should not be used to denote individuals as a person may be admitted to hospital more than once in a year or across a number of years.

Health Service Staff

Mr C McDevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of (i) medical staff; (ii) dental staff; (iii) qualified midwives; (iv) qualified nurses; (v) professional and

technical staff; (vi) social care staff; and (vii) administrative and clerical staff employed by the Health Service in (a) 2006; (b) 2007; (c) 2008 and (d) 2009.

(AQW 5407/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information requested can be found in the quarterly Key Facts Workforce Bulletin on the DHSSPS website at: http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/stats_research/work_force/stats-research.htm

Funding for the Regional Care Adviser Post for Muscular Dystrophy

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what consideration has been given to continued funding for the Regional Care Advisers post for Muscular Dystrophy.

(AQW 5411/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: A business case for the recurrent funding of a Neuromuscular Care Adviser post has been developed by the Belfast Trust and is currently being considered by the Health and Social Care Board.

Out-of-Hours Services

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if the other Health and Social Care Trusts are following the Western Trust in cutting their Out-of-Hours services by 40%.

(AQW 5412/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Out-of Hours services provided by Western Urgent Care are not being cut by 40%. There is a proposal to reduce the number of GPs from 5 to 3 GPs between midnight and 8.30am. However, a further 3 GPs will be on-call and a nurse will be employed to triage the calls during this period.

The other Out of Hours Services providers have no plans at this stage to reduce the level of service provided by them. However, they will continue to review their service delivery to ensure that resources are deployed in a most efficient and effective manner that meets the needs of the population they serve.

Outpatient Appointments

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many 'Did Not Attends' were recorded for outpatient appointments in the last financial year.

(AQW 5416/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The number of patients that did not attend their outpatient appointment in 2008/09 was published in Table 1.3a of the 2008/09 edition of Northern Ireland Hospital Statistics, which can be found at the following link:

http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/stats_research/stats-activity_stats-2/hospital_statistics.htm

North/South body on Health

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much is spent annually by his Department on the North/South body on health.

(AQW 5417/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information requested is available on the Food Safety Promotion Board's website at www.safefood.eu/en/Publication/Corporate-publications.

Outpatient Clinics

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many outpatient clinics were cancelled in each of the last four months in each Health and Social Care Trust; and how many in total were cancelled in the last financial year.

(AQW 5418/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information on outpatient cancellations is collected on an appointment, not clinic, basis.

Cost of Treating People from the Republic of Ireland

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the cost to the Health Service of treating people from the Republic of Ireland in each of the last three years.

(AQW 5419/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Please refer to my answer given in response to AQW 2433/10.

Funding for Muscular Dystrophy

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what funding his Department made available to tackle Muscular Dystrophy in the last financial year; and how much of this money is recurrent.

(AQW 5427/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information is not available in the format requested.

Muscular Dystrophy

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline his Department's plans after May 2010 to support people who have Muscular Dystrophy.

(AQW 5428/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I remain committed to providing appropriate care for people affected by disability in Northern Ireland, including those affected by Muscular Dystrophy. They will continue to have access to services, which include: wheelchair provision, physiotherapy, residential and nursing care, domiciliary support, community nursing support, respite, occupational therapy and day support. Their carers are also offered a Carer's Assessment to determine their needs. My Department is currently developing a disability strategy, which will include neuro-disability. The Strategy will complement existing strategies and partnerships to improve the health and well being of all people with a disability in Northern Ireland.

Regional Care Adviser for Muscular Dystrophy

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether his Department will support and fund a Regional Care Adviser for Muscular Dystrophy.

(AQW 5429/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: A business case for the recurrent funding of a Neuromuscular Care Adviser post has been developed by the Belfast Trust and is currently being considered by the Health and Social Care Board.

Waiting Lists

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action he intends to take to reduce the times patients spend on waiting lists.

(AQW 5430/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department has made excellent progress in reducing hospital waiting times since 2005. The deterioration in performance during 2009/10 is the result of a number of factors, the most significant of which was the uncertainty until recently around the financial position of the Health and Social Care sector in Northern Ireland. The fact that the health service is facing ever increasing demand for its services also has a substantial bearing on the delivery of the waiting times standards now and in the future.

The financial position for the remainder of the 2009/10 is now clear. Each Health and Social Care Trust is currently implementing action plans that seek to improve performance with respect to access times across the full range of specialities for the rest of 2009/10 and beyond.

Performance and Efficiency Delivery Unit

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what engagement his Department has had, or intends to have, with the Performance and Efficiency Delivery Unit.

(AQW 5431/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department has not engaged with the Performance and Efficiency Delivery Unit.

Departmental Posts: Relocation and Decentralisation

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what consideration he has given to posts within his Department that could be relocated or decentralised.

(AQW 5442/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I have no plans for the relocation or decentralisation of posts within the Department.

Numbers of Practising General Practitioners

Mr C McDevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of practising General Practitioners in each year since 2006, broken down by full-time and part-time practice.

(AQW 5443/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The number of General Practitioners in each year since 2006 is shown in the table below. Due to changes in the GMS contract in 2004 information is no longer collected on whole -time equivalent (WTE) status of GPs, therefore a breakdown of General Practitioners by full-time and part-time practice could not be provided.

NUMBER OF GENERAL PRACTITIONERS IN NORTHERN IRELAND, 2006 – 2009

Date	October 2006	October 2007	October 2008	October 2009
Number of General Practitioners ¹	1,111 ²	1,128	1,148	1,156

Source: Family Practitioner Services - HSC Business Services Organisation

Notes:

- 1 Headcount of unrestricted principals or equivalents, and salaried GPs are included. Other types of general practitioner, such as locums, assistants, and associates are not included.
- 2 Revised from the previously published figure of 1,110.

Swine Flu Planning

Mr C McDevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) when Health and Social Care Trusts were directed to prioritise swine flu planning over addressing waiting times; (ii) how this decision was arrived at; and (iii) to provide a copy of the directive, if available.

(AQW 5448/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department did not direct Health and Social Care Trusts to prioritise essential preparedness for Swine Flu over waiting list targets. Swine Flu preparedness planning laid particular emphasis on the maintenance of 'business as usual', alongside containing the outbreak, and making preparations for a severe surge.

The decisions taken by Trusts to defer further expenditure on waiting list initiatives arose from financial uncertainty. My Department's bid for additional funds in June Monitoring had been rejected while demand was increasing across the service. At that stage, no funding was confirmed to meet projected Swine Flu costs despite guarantees as part of the budget settlement, nor was any indication made that my Department would receive the £20m first call on available resources that the Department had been previously guaranteed.

When, after five months of delay, funding was eventually confirmed by DFP in October, Trusts had already taken the decision to pause elective activity across the majority of the independent sector in order to ensure budgets were not exceeded. When funding was confirmed for Swine Flu, I was able to release my budget for waiting list activity. Contracts were brought back online as soon as possible, but the turn around time between the decision to reactivate these services and appointments for patients is typically six to eight weeks.

The majority of patients continue to receive their care within a reasonable timeframe and waiting lists are significantly better compared to the years of direct rule.

PSA 18 Targets in the Programme for Government

Mr C McDevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on progress and outcomes in the delivery of PSA 18 targets in the Programme for Government in relation to (i) promoting independent living and a reduction in avoidable admissions to hospital; (ii) shorter waiting times for access to specialist drugs, specialist hospital services, and elective treatment; and (iii) improving outcomes and survival rates in key specialisms.

(AQW 5449/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The latest published update on progress and outcomes in the delivery of PSA 18 targets in the Programme for Government in relation to (i) promoting independent living and a reduction in avoidable admissions to hospital; (ii) shorter waiting times for access to specialist drugs, specialist hospital services, and elective treatment; and (iii) improving outcomes and survival rates in key specialisms, can be found at the following link:-

http://www.pfgbudgetni.gov.uk/pfg_delivery_report_q4_08_09_final_-_pdf_version-5.pdf

Allegations of Ill-treatment of Patients

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 4988/10, (i) how many of the allegations involve the 30 care companies contracted by the Southern Health and Social Care Trust; (ii) how many individual staff members this involved; and (iii) what action was taken against staff members where the allegations were upheld.

(AQW 5461/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:

- (i) Two allegations of ill-treatment of patients involved staff from the list of 30 private care companies contracted by the Southern Health Care Trust to provide domiciliary care.
- (ii) It is Trust policy not to comment on individual cases.

- (iii) Disciplinary action against staff employed by the care company is a matter for that company.

Costs Incurred by the Use of Interpreters

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 4777/10, if there is an opportunity to recover some, or all, of the costs incurred by the use of interpreters from the European Union or the countries of origin involved.

(AQW 5473/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The need to have an interpreting service is underpinned by equality legislation and is about giving equal access to health services for all. Further, the equality legislation does not have any reference to costs or their recovery.

Therefore, I am not aware of any mechanism or opportunity to recover costs from the EU or other countries of origin.

Sign Language Communicators

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much has been spent on sign language communicators in each Health and Social Care Trust, in each of the last two years.

(AQW 5474/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I refer Mr Morrow to my response to AQW1877 in which this question is answered for 2007/08 and 2008/09.

Physiotherapists with Neuro-physiotherapy Training

Mr B Leonard asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what measures he will take to increase the number of physiotherapists with neuro-physiotherapy training and skills in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust area, so that Multiple Sclerosis patients can receive appropriate, focused and ongoing treatment at a local level.

(AQW 5491/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department has recently established a short-term working group to examine the neuro-physiotherapy service in Northern Ireland, benchmark this against the current NICE guidelines, assess staffing levels and consider options for promoting neuro-physiotherapy amongst physiotherapists. All undergraduate physiotherapy students study neurological conditions, including multiple sclerosis, in the second and third years of their course and specialist development programmes are available post-qualification on neurological conditions, including Multiple Sclerosis.

Multiple Sclerosis Nurses

Mr B Leonard asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) when the Causeway Hospital will have a Multiple Sclerosis nurse in place; (ii) how many MS nurses are employed in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust area; and (iii) how this number compares with the other Health Trusts.

(AQW 5493/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:

- (i) There are no plans to have an MS specialist nurse based locally at Causeway hospital.
- (ii) Northern Trust has a 0.5 WTE funded position which has become vacant recently and the Trust is currently in the process of recruitment. This post works in partnership with MS specialist nurses who provide an outreach service from the Belfast Trust for the Northern Trust area.
- (iii) There are a total of 9.6 WTE Specialist Multiple Sclerosis Nurses in Northern Ireland.

In addition to the 0.5 WTE in the Northern Trust there are 7.3 WTE MS nurses based in Belfast Trust and provide a regional service to patients in Southern, South Eastern, Belfast and Northern Trust areas with 1WTE based permanently in Craigavon Hospital.

Western Trust also has 1.8 WTE nurses in post; one nurse covering the South and one in the North.

Diabetes

Mr J Craig asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people have been diagnosed with (i) type one; and (ii) type two diabetes in the Lagan Valley constituency in each of the last five years.

(AQW 5501/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information requested is not available centrally.

Swine Flu Vaccines

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many swine flu vaccines were distributed in North Down.

(AQW 5520/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: This information could only be supplied at disproportionate cost. All GP Practices across Northern Ireland can order swine flu vaccines as and when required.

Funding for Education, Training and Advocacy Organisations Representing Deaf and Blind People

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the amount of mainstream funding made available for education, training and advocacy organisations representing (i) deaf people; and (ii) blind people, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 5521/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information in the form requested is not readily available and could only be compiled at disproportionate cost.

Emergency Ambulance Vehicles

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) to detail the number of emergency ambulance vehicles (a) that are more than three years old; and (b) that have more than 100,000 miles registered; and (ii) to outline the policies in place to minimise the risk of breakdowns related to age and high mileage.

(AQW 5522/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) currently has 78 A&E ambulances which are over three years old all of which have a mileage of more than 100,000.

To minimise the risk of breakdowns, ambulance crews carry out a vehicle inspection at the start of each shift and report any defects; emergency ambulances are serviced in advance of manufacturer's recommended intervals and are prioritised for replacement on the basis of age and mileage. Furthermore, NIAS's Fleet Strategy specifies that its A&E ambulances should be replaced after five years which is a standard widely used throughout the UK.

In addition, I have made available £17.4 million capital over the CSR period to modernise NIAS's fleet, estate, equipment and IT infrastructure. This investment will primarily be used to begin replacing NIAS's fleet, allowing, among other things, around 20 A&E ambulances to be replaced annually.

Bonuses for Senior Staff

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 2008/09; (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 in 2008/09.

(AQW 5546/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I sought no bonuses for any senior members of staff in my Department in 2008/09.

Agenda for Change

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on Agenda for Change.

(AQW 5574/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Agenda for Change implementation process is being carried out in partnership between management and Trade Union representatives in HSC organisations. Latest reports show that over 71,000, or 99.8% of the AfC workforce, have been paid their AfC arrears. This leaves less than 1% of the current AfC workforce that have yet to be paid arrears due to them. In addition over 9,700 former staff have yet to receive their arrears. HSC organisations are making every effort to clear the backlog of arrears payments at the earliest possible date.

17%, or over 12,000, of the AfC workforce have submitted applications to have their grading reviewed and nearly 45% of these reviews have been processed. HSC organisations plan to have all the review applications processed by the end of September 2010.

Over 180 posts will require full job evaluation. HSC organisations are currently looking at job evaluation training for both management and Trade Union staff with a view to this process commencing once the review process has been complete.

Asbestos

Mr C McDevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail any findings of asbestos in buildings owned or managed by the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust in the last ten years.

(AQW 5590/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Belfast Health & Social Care Trust, in compliance with the Control of Asbestos Regulations (NI) 2007, maintains Asbestos Registers for all properties in which asbestos has been identified.

These registers contain a vast amount of related data which would be impractical to detail in this answer.

Cardiac Surgeons

Mr C McDevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many cardiac surgeons practising cardiac bypasses were employed by the Belfast Health and Social Trust in each of the last five years.

(AQW 5592/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The requested information is provided in the table below.

CARDIAC CONSULTANT SURGEONS EMPLOYED BY BELFAST HSC TRUST TO CARRY OUT CORONARY ARTERY BYPASS GRAFTS (CABG)

Year	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Headcount	6	7	8	8	8

Source: Belfast Health & Social Care (HSC) Trust

Notes:

1. It is not possible to provide a whole-time equivalent figure as actual time spent practicing bypasses will vary according to workload.

Waiting Lists for Cardiac Bypasses

Mr C McDevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many patients were on waiting lists for cardiac bypasses in the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust in each of the last five years.

(AQW 5593/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The number of patients on the inpatient waiting list for a cardiac bypass in the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust, at 31st December, in each of the last three years¹, is shown in the table below.

Quarter Ending	No. of patients on waiting list for a cardiac bypass in BHSCT
31st December 2009	248
31st December 2008	209
31st December 2007	206

Source: DHSSPS Inpatient Waiting Times Dataset

- 1 The Department commenced the collection of inpatient waiting time data at patient level in 2007/08.

Prior to this, the Department collected inpatient waiting time data on an aggregate data return that recorded patients waiting by specialty. It is not possible to identify the intended procedure for which a patient was awaiting admission prior to 2007/08.

Adoption of Children Bill

Mr D Ford asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the proposals for the adoption of children bill.

(AQW 5629/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I issued a draft paper to the Executive on 6 June 2009 seeking agreement to the development of an Adoption and Children Bill. To date responses to the draft paper have been received from nine Departments, with one response still outstanding from the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM). The Adoption and Children Bill is currently scheduled to be enacted in 2011; however the final timetable for the introduction of the Bill is dependent on Executive approval for the Bill as well as other legislative priorities. Until comments have been received from OFMDFM in relation to the draft Executive paper, I am unable to progress the development of a new Adoption and Children Bill any further.

Partnerships in Care UK

Rt Hon J Donaldson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much the Health Service has paid to Partnerships in Care UK for the provision of psychiatric or mental health care in each of the last three years.

(AQW 5722/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: In 2009/10 Partnerships in Care UK were paid £548k for the provision of psychiatric care. No services were commissioned from the organisation in the previous 2 years.

Residential Care in the Moyle District Council Area

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he will carry out a needs analysis on the future of residential care in the Moyle District Council area.

(AQW 5731/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: A needs analysis of the dependency levels and the accommodation needs of older people in the Moyle area was carried out by the Northern Health and Social Care Trust in November 2009.

Rathmoyle Nursing Home

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why the needs analysis carried out on Rathmoyle Nursing Home did not take into consideration the future residential care needs.

(AQW 5765/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The needs assessment carried by the Northern Health and Social Care Trust in the Moyle area took account of all the likely future social care needs of the older people in the area, including the future provision of residential care.

Partnerships in Health UK

Rt Hon J Donaldson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much it would cost the Health Service to provide the services currently delivered by Partnerships in Health UK for patients requiring psychiatric or mental health care.

(AQW 5766/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Partnerships in Health UK is providing specialist care for patients who need to be accommodated in a low secure setting. Currently there are no dedicated low secure units in Northern Ireland. My Department has established a working group to scope the need for local low secure facilities and the cost of providing these. The Group is expected to report its findings to the Department by the Summer of 2010.

Mephedrone

Dr A McDonnell asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) how many people have been treated in hospital for suspected consumption of mephedrone in the last 3 years; (ii) the age of the people treated; and (iii) what plans he has to work with the Minister of Education to roll out a proactive education campaign among young people and parents on the harmful effects of this drug.

(AQW 5785/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information is not available on the number of hospital admissions that could be related to the suspected consumption of mephedrone. The Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs is likely to be recommending to the UK Government further action including probable legal controls on mephedrone when it meets on 29 March and we will reviewing our own position and response following that meeting. However, the Public Health Agency has already

produced a fact sheet for parents and adults which has been made available to the Department of Education, with whom my Department works closely on a range of health-related behaviours including alcohol and drug misuse.

Belfast City Hospital Site

Mr C McDevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what proposals he has received from the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust about the potential rationalisation of services and/or facilities on the Belfast City Hospital site; and what discussions he has had with the Trust on this issue.

(AQW 5837/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Proposals for the rationalisation of services and/or facilities are made by Trusts in conjunction with the Health and Social Care Board based on need, priority and value for money.

Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 5272/10, if he has received a response from the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service in relation to the recommendations contained within the Department of Finance and Personnel's independent report; and to outline the details of that response.

(AQW 5883/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue (NIFRS) has provided its initial observations on the review report. These provide some observations and make a small number of suggestions. NIFRS has also provided comments on a number of the report's recommendations, which I am currently considering.

Department for Regional Development

Proposed A5 Road

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister for Regional Development what discussions he has had with (i) the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development; and (ii) the Minister of the Environment, in relation to the environmental issues surrounding the proposed A5 road.

(AQW 5548/10)

Minister for Regional Development (Mr C Murphy): I have not had any formal meetings with the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development or the Minister of the Environment in relation to the environmental issues surrounding the proposed A5 road.

Proposed A5 Road

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister for Regional Development when the detail of the proposed A5 Road scheme was brought to the Executive; and if the proposal received approval from all other Ministers.

(AQW 5549/10)

Minister for Regional Development: Proposals for the A5 road scheme are contained in the investment strategy (ISNI) 2008 - 2018, which was agreed by the Executive and endorsed by the Assembly in January 2008.

The Strategy sets 'Key Goals' one of which highlights the upgrading of key transport corridors connecting major towns and cities to regional gateways, the Belfast metropolitan area and the Southern road network. These key goals are complemented by milestones, including one for the A5 dualling scheme, setting a target for completion within the lifetime of the strategy.

The Investment Delivery Plan (IDP) for Roads, which was published in April 2008, outlines the expanded major roads programme, including the A5 dualling. My Department's Roads Service develops each scheme within the programme in accordance with established procedures, which do not require referral to the Executive or Assembly. Ministers will also have been kept informed of progress on the A5 scheme through papers presented to the North South Ministerial Council.

Road Conditions in Newry and Armagh

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the condition of the roads in the Newry and Armagh constituency.

(AQW 5570/10)

Minister for Regional Development: The repeated freeze and thaw cycles experienced during the recent prolonged period of very cold weather, has had a serious impact on the condition of roads across the whole of the North, including roads in the Newry and Armagh constituency. Problems have included rapid surface and foundation deterioration and, on occasion, the complete stripping of bituminous layers. During this period, my Department's Roads Service focused on providing its front line service, by keeping the gritted network operational, and dealing with the demands of the public. However, repair priorities were kept under review, as the impact of these conditions became evident.

All of the North's roads are currently being inspected in accordance with Roads Service's maintenance standards, and considerable effort has been made since the period of cold weather, by Roads Service and its contractors, to reduce the backlog of road surface defects.

It is a matter of record that the overall investment level for the structural maintenance of roads still falls significantly short of that recommended. However, I am satisfied that the limited resources available to maintain the road network in the North are fairly distributed, and that the Newry and Armagh constituency continues to receive a fair share of the available resources. Road Service's structural maintenance funds are distributed on the basis of need, assessed with reference to road length, volume of defects and population.

Completion of the Armagh East Link and the West Link

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the timescale for completion of (i) the Armagh East Link; and (ii) the West Link.

(AQW 5572/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the proposed Armagh East Link is included within the schedule of schemes that could be started within the next ten years, subject to satisfactory economic and other appraisals, availability of funding and satisfactory progression through the Statutory Procedures.

The proposed Armagh North and West Link is included in Roads Service's Preparation Pool which contains schemes that are expected to start within the next five years, subject to satisfactory completion of the necessary Statutory Procedures and the level of funding available at that time.

Upgrading of the Keady to Castleblaney Road

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the upgrading of the Keady to Castleblaney Road.

(AQW 5573/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that a number of improvement schemes have recently been completed on this stretch of the B3 from Keady, including:-

- in July 2009, the provision of a right turning lane, along with associated works, at the junction with Derrynoose, at a cost in the region of £350,000; and
- in January 2009, road safety improvements, including the provision of bend warning signage, high visibility chevrons and road studs, near Carnagh.

In addition, Roads Service has also advised of a planned realignment scheme at a bend near Murphy's Corner, approximately a half a mile south of Keady. This scheme is being currently developed, but has not been programmed for completion.

Roads Service will continue to inspect this stretch of the B3 and note any actionable defects for repair in accordance with their maintenance guidelines.

Parking Spaces in the Larne, Carrickfergus and Newtownabbey Borough Council Areas

Mr A Ross asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the number of (i) disabled; (ii) free; and (iii) pay and display parking spaces available in the (a) Larne Borough Council; (b) Carrickfergus Borough Council; and (c) Newtownabbey Borough Council areas, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 5575/10)

Minister for Regional Development: Details of the number of disabled, free and pay-and-display (P&D) parking spaces available for use in my Department's Roads Service off-street car parks, in each of the last five financial years, is provided in the table below:

OFF-STREET CAR PARKING SPACES

	Larne Borough Council			Carrickfergus Borough Council			Newtownabbey Borough Council		
	Disabled	Free	P&D	Disabled	Free	P&D	Disabled	Free	P&D
05/06	33	378	291	25	23	487	18	288	127
06/07	33	378	291	25	23	487	18	288	127
07/08	33	378	291	25	23	487	18	288	127
08/09	33	378	283	25	23	487	18	288	127
09/10	33	378	283	25	23	487	18	288	127

The number of disabled parking spaces includes both free and charged spaces and is additional to the figures in the 'Free' and 'P&D' columns.

With regard to on-street parking spaces within these Council areas, details of the number of on-street disabled parking bays, available in each of the last five financial years, is provided in the table below:

DISABLED ON-STREET PARKING SPACES

	Larne Borough Council	Carrickfergus Borough Council	Newtownabbey Borough Council
05/06	26	12	14
06/07	30	15	14
07/08	33	18	15
08/09	37	19	18
09/10	39	19	18

The number of free on-street parking bays are not available. However, I can advise that free on-street parking is widely available to motorists whether or not parking bays have been specifically marked out, unless specific restrictions such as bus stops, loading bays or waiting restrictions have been provided. There are no on-street charged parking spaces in these Council areas.

Parking Tickets Issued by National Car Parks

Mr T Burns asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) how many parking tickets have been issued by the National Car Parks, since the start of their contract, to vehicles registered in (a) the Republic of Ireland; (b) Britain; (c) other EU countries; and (d) non-EU countries; and (ii) how many of these fines have been (a) paid; (b) not paid; and (c) repealed.

(AQW 5586/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that separate figures are only available in relation to Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs) issued to vehicles registered in the South. Figures are not available in relation to PCNs issued to vehicles registered in Britain, other EU and non-EU countries.

My Department's contract for the Operation of Parking and Enforcement Services with NSL Ltd (previously NCP), commenced in October 2006. The figures for southern registered vehicles, for the period 1 November 2006 to 28 February 2010, are detailed in the table below:-

	PCNs Issued	PCNs Paid	PCNs Unpaid	PCNs Cancelled
Southern registered vehicles	41,236	10,171	28,558	2,507

Enterprise Train Service

Mr T Burns asked the Minister for Regional Development why a peak time hourly Enterprise train service between Belfast and Dublin is not in operation; and to provide an estimate of the costs of introducing such a service.

(AQW 5587/10)

Minister for Regional Development: An hourly Enterprise service is not available at peak times because the additional rolling stock required to run such services is not available. NI Railways have been in discussion with DRD and Iarnród Éireann about alternative rolling stock options to support an hourly frequency.

To provide hourly service frequencies, the Enterprise train fleet would need to be increased from 3 operational trains to 6 operational trains. The cost of the additional trains would be in the region of £40m and operating costs would be circa £5m per year, which could be partially offset by the increase in passenger revenue. These costs would be shared between Iarnród Éireann and NI Railways or passed to the respective departments in terms of increased Public Service Obligations. This is a significant budgetary issue.

NI Water

Mr D Kinahan asked the Minister for Regional Development what steps NI Water has taken to prevent its activities causing pollution; and for his assessment of the recent fine imposed on NI Water following an inspection on 8 December 2008.

(AQW 5589/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that it is committed to addressing the legacy of underinvestment in wastewater installations and infrastructure that has proved a major contributing factor to the number of pollution incidents attributed to NIW. In developing its programme of capital delivery, NIW worked closely with the Environmental Regulators to prioritise projects to ensure maximum benefit is achieved. The upgrading of wastewater treatment works (WWTW) through the Capital Works Programme and Drainage Areas Plans will contribute to a future reduction in the number of pollution incidents. The Rural Wastewater Investment Programme, which targets small rural WWTWs for upgrade, is also being implemented across the North. These schemes have also been prioritised by the Environmental Regulator.

With regard to the sewerage system, NIW is installing monitors and alarms at high risk Combined Sewer Overflows and strategic sites to give early warnings of potential problems which will enable operators to take evasive action before an actual discharge occurs. The majority of pollution incidents in the sewerage system are due to blockages caused by the disposal of inappropriate materials such as nappies, baby wipes and sanitary items which the systems are not designed to deal with. NIW has initiated a "Bag it and Bin it" campaign to inform the public of the issues associated with inappropriate flushing of materials of this nature. The campaign includes NIW Education Officers engaging with schools, hospitals, nursing homes, libraries and community groups.

NIW is continually improving its overall response time to reported incidents. Internal training programmes have been implemented to increase staff awareness of all the issues associated with pollution incidents and to further improve the critical aspects of dealing with pollution incidents.

The fine of £2,000 was imposed on NIW in respect of a pollution incident in the River Lagan on 8 December 2008. The incident resulted from an overflow from a storm tank at Newtownbreda Wastewater Treatment Works. The level of the fine reflects NIW's prompt response in dealing with the incident.

Damage to Roads

Mr D O'Loan asked the Minister for Regional Development why, in light of the serious damage to roads caused by the cold weather in December and January, his Department did not bid for capital funding in the February monitoring round.

(AQW 5618/10)

Minister for Regional Development: The final monitoring round of the year was commissioned in February of this year, with an expected outcome in March. This round is normally to facilitate final adjustments to budgets and few bids are made or met, as by the time the outcome is known, Spring Supplementary Estimates have already been finalised. As part of any proposed bids, the Department must confirm that funds received will be spent by the end of the financial year, which given the timing of the outcome in March, left only weeks for any funds to be expended.

Roads Service did receive £15m of additional capital funding, at the outcome of the December round, which was announced in early January 2010. However, during the period from December to February, the North experienced some of the worst winter weather in decades. As a result, expenditure on maintenance schemes, including the additional £15m, has progressed much slower than expected.

Consequently, Roads Service and the Department considered that there was a substantial risk that a February bid, even if successful, could not be spent by the end of the financial year, therefore, Roads Service did not submit a bid in the February round. Roads Service will, however, continue to submit bids in the 2010/11 year, to seek funds to repair the damage done to the network by the recent bad weather and to address the significant shortfall in maintenance funding.

Plumbing Inspectors

Mr A Bresland asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) what was the grade of plumbing inspectors in the Water Service; and (ii) what is the grade of plumbing inspectors in NI Water.

(AQW 5627/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that within Water Service the four Plumbing Inspectors were graded as industrial posts. Two were graded at Craft Grade A and two were graded at Class I. The grading of the posts did not change when NIW was established on 1 April 2007.

Traffic Calming Schemes in North Belfast

Ms C Ní Chuilín 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 North Belfast constituency.

(AQW 5633/10)

Minister for Regional Development: Details of traffic calming schemes completed by my Department's Roads Service in the North 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
Duncairn Gardens	Duncairn Gardens.
Lepper Street	Lepper Street, Spamount Street, Churchill Street, Dawson Street, Sheridan Street, Upper Meadow Street, Stratheden Street, Hallidays Road.
Alexandra Gardens	Alexandra Gardens
Bilston Road	Bilston Road, Tedburn Park, Glenbank Place, Leroy Street, Primrose Street.
Ballysillan Park	Ballysillan Park.
Jellicoe Avenue	Jellicoe Avenue.

Roads Service has advised that there are no traffic calming schemes underway at present.

Details of traffic calming schemes currently at the planning or consultation stage in the North Belfast constituency are set out in the table below:

TRAFFIC CALMING SCHEMES CURRENTLY AT THE PLANNING OR CONSULTATION STAGE

Cambrai Street	Bowness Street
Crimea Street	Kilcoole Park
Snugville Street	Duncoole Park
Sydney Street West	Rosscoole Park
Geoffrey Street	Mountcoole Park
Danube Street	Brianville Park
Silvio Street	Slievedarragh Park
Keswick Street	Slievetoyle Park

I would remind the Member that information on completed and proposed roads schemes 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:

www.roadsni.gov.uk/index/publications/publications-council_reports.htm

NI Water

Mr T Burns asked the Minister for Regional Development how many complaints NI Water has received from business customers in the last five years, broken down by the nature of the complaint.

(AQW 5638/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that it only holds total records of complaints prior to October 2007 and is unable to provide the breakdown of information for business customers sought prior to that date. The table below therefore shows a total of 21,966 complaints (telephone and written) received from October 2007 to 18 March 2010 and includes a breakdown of the nature of these complaints.

Nature of Complaint	2007 (from October)	2008	2009	2010 (to 18 March)
Billing	141	144	34	5
Customer Service	617	932	350	54
Operational	310	389	77	11
Sewerage	622	1,525	1,758	445
Water	1,337	3,543	5,664	2,994
Other	770	185	51	8
Total	3,797	6,718	7,934	3,517

Enterprise Railway Service

Mr T Burns asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 4974/10, to detail (i) the number of journeys made on the Enterprise Railway service; and (ii) the amount of revenue generated, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 5639/10)

Minister for Regional Development: Translink have provided the following passenger number and revenue information. Please note that data for 2009/10 is only available up to and including period 11.

Year	Passenger Journeys ('000)	Revenue (£'m)
2005/06	820	5.5
2006/07	862	6.2
2007/08	883	6.5
2008/09	834	6.6
Periods 1-11 2009/10	637*	4.4

(* Iarnród Éireann settlements estimated)

Note the revenue figures are not comparable with previous years as a discounted fare scheme has run since November 2009 and because of Malahide bridge collapse.

Potholes

Mr T Burns asked the Minister for Regional Development how many potholes have been repaired from January 2010 to date; and how does this compare to the same period in each of the last three years.

(AQW 5640/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it does not maintain figures solely in relation to the number of potholes either recorded or repaired. However, the table below provides details of the total number of surface defects recorded during the first two months of this year, as well as comparable figures for the first two months in each of the previous three years.

	1 January – 28 February 2007	1 January – 29 February 2008	1 January – 28 February 2009	1 January – 28 February 2010
Number of defects recorded ¹	26744	26600	37694	45523

1. Total number of recorded surface defects (including potholes) in the carriageway, hard shoulder and lay-bys.

EU Structural Funds

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development to which areas of funding from the EU Structural Funds can his Department apply.

(AQW 5641/10)

Minister for Regional Development: Applications for EU Structural Funds can be made by my Department through the European Territorial Cooperation Programme (INTERREG IV).

There are three main strands under INTERREG IV: Cross-border cooperation; Trans-national cooperation; and Interregional cooperation. My Department can make an application for funding under all of these strands subject to projects meeting the set criteria.

Water and Sewerage Infrastructure in Lagan Valley

Mr J Craig asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans NI Water has for water and sewerage infrastructure in the Lagan Valley constituency, in each of the next three years.

(AQW 5648/10)

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 Lagan Valley constituency, but an investment of around £18 million is anticipated during 2010/11.

This investment will include the continuation of projects such as Crewhill Service Reservoir, Hook's Corner Wastewater Treatment Works and Maghaberry Flood Alleviation and the commencement of new projects such as Dunmurry Wastewater Treatment Works and watermain network improvements in the Fofanny/Banbridge area.

CO 71 Contract Services Tender

Mr G Savage asked the Minister for Regional Development how many respondents fulfilled the staff criteria for the CO 71 contract services tender.

(AQW 5661/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that the four contractors who submitted bids for tender C071 indicated in their bid how they would meet the evaluation criteria against which the award of contract was made. This included the provision of adequate numbers of temporary technicians to properly resource the contract to meet NIW's needs.

CO 71 Contract Services Tender

Mr G Savage asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the number of responses that NI Water received for the CO 71 contract services tender; and, of those who responded, to list those companies based (i) in Northern Ireland; and (ii) outside Northern Ireland.

(AQW 5662/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that four bids were received for tender C071 by the designated closing date and time. The bids were from the following companies based here-

Graham Facilities Management
S O'Connor
TES Limited
Williams Industrial

Plumbing Inspector

Mr A Bresland asked Minister for Regional Development if the post of Plumbing Inspector has been upgraded since the inception of NI Water, and if so, to detail (i) the reasons for this upgrade; and (ii) the costs involved.

(AQW 5665/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that the post of Plumbing Inspector has not been upgraded since the inception of NIW.

Non-domestic Water Charges

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Regional Development why community buildings used only by non-profit making community groups are subject to non-domestic water charges.

(AQW 5680/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that all properties not used exclusively for domestic purposes are subject to water and sewerage charges, and trade effluent charges where applicable. Community buildings are classed as non-domestic in the same way as charities and other non-profit organisations such as churches and schools.

Enterprise Railway Service

Mr T Burns asked the Minister for Regional Development how much revenue has been generated from the sale of food, drink and other sundries on the Enterprise railway service in each of the last five years.

(AQW 5683/10)

Minister for Regional Development: Translink has advised me that it does not generate revenue from the sale of food, drink and other sundries on Enterprise services. Instead Translink has a tendered contract for the supply of such services.

Details of revenue generated are considered as commercially sensitive information to the company delivering the contract.

Enterprise Railway Service

Mr T Burns asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) the exchange rate between pounds sterling and the euro currently used on the Enterprise railway service; and (ii) how this rate is calculated.

(AQW 5685/10)

Minister for Regional Development: NI Railways uses a rate of exchange of £1 = €1.15 for those passengers tendering Euro to purchase their tickets. The current exchange rate has been in place since May 2009.

Practice is to conduct sales in the currency of the country of jurisdiction. Passengers have the facility of changing currency at Central Station, as well as the facility of paying by credit card. Under existing

arrangements both rail companies share, partly, in overall revenue generated. For this reason it is considered important to maintain stability in pricing.

Removing Dead Animals from Roads

Mr G Savage asked the Minister for Regional Development who is responsible for removing dead animals from (i) rural roads; (ii) urban roads; and (iii) motorways and carriageways.

(AQW 5687/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service is responsible for clearing animal carcasses from the motorway network. In the case of all other roads, responsibility for this task lies with district councils.

NI Water

Mr G Savage asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the possible (i) implications; and (ii) costs to NI Water and the tax-payer of NI Water's awarding of contracts by single tender actions.

(AQW 5688/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that it is currently working through the findings of the Independent Review Team's review of procurement governance. It will assess the nature and extent of the issues and prepare a detailed programme of work to ensure that any control weaknesses are addressed as a matter of urgency. Until this work is complete, NIW will not be in a position to comment on the possible implications or the costs involved of awarding contracts by single tender action.

NI Water Board Members

Mr G Savage asked the Minister for Regional Development to provide a breakdown of payments made to the four NI Water Board members, recently dismissed, including (i) salary; (ii) bonuses; (iii) expenses; and (iv) any other payments, for the entirety of their time with NI Water.

(AQW 5689/10)

Minister for Regional Development: Northern Ireland Water (NIW) has provided details of the fees and expenses paid to the four non-executive NIW Board members for the entirety of their time with NIW and these are set out in the table below. None of these non-executive Board members received any bonus or other payments during their time with NIW.

	2007/08		2008/09		2009/10	
	Fees	Expenses	Fees	Expenses	Fees	Expenses
Christopher Mellor	£70,500	£2,600	£159,000*	£23,419*	£87,882*	£15,829*
Ruth Thompson	£26,167	£1,145	£24,750	£5,270	£20,250	£3,450
John Ballard	£30,375	£1,459	£24,000	£9,187	£20,250	£5,713
Declan Gormley	£0	£0	£12,000	£1,167	£21,750	£886

* These fees and expenses figures reflect the fact that for part of 2008/09 and part of 2009/10 the NIW Chairman had undertaken a joint role as Chairman and Chief Executive within NIW.

Bonuses Paid to the Executive Directors of NI Water

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister for Regional Development, following his statement on 15 March 2010 in relation to NI Water (i) whether the bonuses paid to the Executive Directors of NI Water (a)

were paid as part of their contract; (b) were contractual obligations; and (c) were in line with wider civil service pay policy; and (ii) if his Department had any discretion in approving the bonuses.

(AQW 5790/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that, in relation to (i) (a) & (b), under the Executive Directors' terms and conditions of employment, there is the potential for discretionary bonus payments, however these are not contractual obligations. I can confirm that the bonuses paid for 2008/09 were (c) in line with the 2008 NI Civil Service Pay Strategy as advised by the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP); and (ii) my Department had discretion in approving the bonuses and was required to seek DFP approval, which it did.

Translink Website

Mr D Kinahan asked the Minister for Regional Development if Translink has plans to improve its website.

(AQW 5808/10)

Minister for Regional Development: A project to redesign and upgrade the Translink website is nearing completion and the new website should be launched within the coming weeks.

Department for Social Development

Village Redevelopment Area of South Belfast

Ms A Lo asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of properties (i) that have been blocked up; and (ii) that are due to be blocked up as a result of the Advance Purchase Scheme in the Village redevelopment area of south Belfast.

(AQW 5406/10)

Minister for Social Development (Ms M Ritchie): To date, 129 properties have been acquired in the Village area by the Housing Executive under the Advance Purchase Scheme and work has been undertaken on each to make them secure. A further 12 applications are currently being considered and will also be secured upon completion.

Village Redevelopment Area of South Belfast

Ms A Lo asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the total cost to date of blocking up properties, including the cost of advance purchases, home loss and disturbance payments, in the Village redevelopment area of south Belfast.

(AQW 5409/10)

Minister for Social Development: To date the Northern Ireland Housing Executive has acquired 129 properties in the Village through the Advance Purchase Scheme. The cost of acquiring these properties was £15,852,500. The cost of Home Loss payments in respect of these properties was £1,585,250 and disturbance payments totalling £158,630 have been made.

The cost of securing these properties has been approximately based on an average cost of £500 to secure each property.

Village Area of South Belfast

Ms A Lo asked the Minister for Social Development how many houses in the Village area of south Belfast are over 100 years old; and how many of these are in the redevelopment area.

(AQW 5410/10)

Minister for Social Development: All 1312 properties within the Village Urban Renewal Area were constructed between 1900 and 1910 or during the inter war period.

The Housing Executive is currently undertaking an analysis of these dwellings and expects this information will be available in the coming weeks.

Village Redevelopment Area of South Belfast

Ms A Lo asked the Minister for Social Development what help is available to people with mortgages and/or home improvement loans in the Village redevelopment area of south Belfast following the vesting of their homes.

(AQW 5413/10)

Minister for Social Development: Compensation equivalent to market value, home loss and disturbance payments will be available for those who own homes in the Village which have to be acquired to make way for redevelopment activity.

Eligibility will vary depending on the precise circumstances of each applicant and the Housing Executive will be happy to discuss those with all interested parties directly.

In addition I will shortly publish new proposals designed specifically to support owner occupiers living in redevelopment areas remain in their community after redevelopment has taken place.

Village Redevelopment Area of South Belfast

Ms A Lo asked the Minister for Social Development if she will consider free or 'peppercorn' rent for residents living in the Village redevelopment area of south Belfast to encourage them to stay in the area.

(AQW 5415/10)

Minister for Social Development: At the operative date of vesting, all occupiers of privately owned dwellings in the Village redevelopment area of south Belfast will become Housing Executive tenants and liable to pay rent, albeit a substantially reduced amount of rent.

Rents will be assessed based on the rent point system operated by the Housing Executive and when assessed will be reduced to just one third of that figure to take account of the circumstances under which the Housing Executive acquired the home.

Departmental Posts: Relocation and Decentralisation

Mr D McKay asked the Minister for Social Development what consideration she has given to posts within her Department that could be relocated or decentralised.

(AQW 5439/10)

Minister for Social Development: My Department is already well dispersed to locations outside Belfast. Some 2,800 DSD staff are already located outside Belfast.

In November 2008, as part of the exercise associated with the Bain report, I gave consideration to which posts might be relocated outside the Belfast area and I again commissioned a further exercise to be carried out in October 2009. Both exercises concluded that there are significant constraints at both operational and financial level to relocating existing posts. I will however keep the position under review. I am committed to ensuring that every opportunity is taken, where possible, to locate new jobs outside of the Belfast area and it is my intention to locate the new Charities Commission, which is a non-departmental public body, in a location outside of the Belfast.

Disabled Facilities Grant

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Social Development what mechanisms are in place to ensure an appropriate standard of workmanship in individual cases of work carried out under a Disabled Facilities Grant.

(AQW 5444/10)

Minister for Social Development: Where the approved cost of grant works exceeds £5000, the Housing Executive sets a condition that the applicant must use a builder who is a member of one of the following recognised Warranted Builders Schemes:-

- Building Guarantee Scheme (BGS)
- Contractors Insurance Guarantee Services (CIGS)
- Construction Insurance Direct (CID)
- Contractors Register Ltd (CRL)
- National Register of Warranted Builders (NRWB)

Where the cost of works is under £5000, payment is usually only made when the Housing Executive and the Occupational Therapist confirm that the work has been completed to their satisfaction. The Housing Executive also recommends that applicants should retain their own surveyor to ensure works are carried out to a satisfactory standard.

Disabled Facilities Grant Scheme

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Social Development on how many occasions has work carried out by contractors, under the Disabled Facilities Grant scheme, not been approved by her Department in each of the last five years.

(AQW 5445/10)

Minister for Social Development: There were two instances in the last five years, both in 2005/2006, where work carried out by contractors under the Disabled Facilities Grant scheme was not approved by the Housing Executive.

Disabled Facilities Grants

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Social Development how many contractors have been removed from departmental lists of approved contractors as a result of sub-standard work carried out under Disabled Facilities Grants.

(AQW 5446/10)

Minister for Social Development: The Housing Executive does not hold a list of contractors for private sector grants work.

Village Redevelopment Area of South Belfast

Ms A Lo asked the Minister for Social Development if she will consider increasing the home loss payments for home owners in the Village redevelopment area of south Belfast who feel that they are being forced to sell their homes to the Housing Executive during a recession.

(AQW 5453/10)

Minister for Social Development: Compensation equivalent to 10% of the market value of the property being acquired is payable to owner occupiers who qualify for this Home Loss payment. The 10% payable is subject to a minimum payment of £4,500 and a maximum of £45,000.

For other non owner occupiers, a flat rate disturbance payment of £4,500 is payable.

These limits are determined by the provisions of the Land Acquisition & Compensation (Northern Ireland) Order 1973 Part 1V, Articles 30 & 31 and there are no plans at this stage to change that legislation.

Ex-military Houses

Mr A McQuillan asked the Minister for Social Development if her Department has purchased any ex-military houses, other than Pond Park in Lisburn, in this financial year.

(AQW 5476/10)

Minister for Social Development: No ex-Ministry of Defence properties have been purchased for social housing during this financial year (1 April 2009 – 31 March 2010).

Fold Housing Association is currently in negotiations to acquire 47 existing properties at St Patricks Barracks, Ballymena for social housing.

Subject to acquisition, it is anticipated that Fold will commence refurbishment work early in the 2010/11 financial year with a view to making the properties available to tenants later that same year.

Regional Private Rent Deposit Scheme

Mr A McQuillan asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the Regional Private Rent Deposit Scheme.

(AQW 5481/10)

Minister for Social Development: There is currently no private rent deposit scheme in Northern Ireland. However, last year I consulted on a range of proposals for the private rented sector and in order to address the difficulties which surround the return of tenants' deposits I intend to introduce a rent deposit scheme. This scheme will safeguard tenants' deposits and allow for any disputes to be dealt with speedily and independently. I intend to bring forward the necessary enabling legislation at the first availability opportunity.

Partner Landlord Scheme

Mr A McQuillan asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the progress made between the Housing Executive and private landlords on the Partner Landlord Scheme.

(AQW 5485/10)

Minister for Social Development: The Housing Executive has introduced a Partner Landlord Scheme initially in the Newry District. The key elements of this web-based Scheme are:-

- Landlords will agree to let properties at Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates and at an acceptable standard.
- A website facility will be made available for:-
 - Landlords to advertise properties; and
 - Applicants to view and make contact with the relevant Landlords
- Applicants taking up any such tenancies agree to come off the social housing waiting list and any homeless duty under the Housing (Northern Ireland) Order, 1988, will be deemed to have been met in full.
- Landlords providing tenancies to waiting list applicants will be offered a rent guarantee equivalent to one months rent in lieu of deposit.
- Landlords agree to let such properties for a minimum two year leasing period.

The pilot scheme is being implemented on a phased basis during March and April and it is the Housing Executive's intention to roll out the initiative across all their District Offices upon evaluation of the pilot.

Housing Legislation

Mr A McQuillan asked the Minister for Social Development what arrangements are in place to ensure landlords comply with relevant housing legislation.

(AQW 5486/10)

Minister for Social Development: Under the Private Tenancies (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 and the Rent (Northern Ireland) Order 1978 local Councils have enforcement powers where landlords are in breach of the law. Such breaches attract fines imposed by the Courts. Where appropriate rent control may be applied. My answer to your question about fitness standards in the private rented sector provides further details. (AQW 5561/10)

Housing Community Network

Mr A McQuillan asked the Minister for Social Development how many rural groups involved in the Housing Community Network in the Coleraine Borough Council area have taken the opportunity to develop and understand media literacy and avail of the digital inclusion training through the Housing Executive. (AQW 5504/10)

Minister for Social Development: There are five rural community groups in the Housing Community Network in the Coleraine area; four of these have received the facility of a mini website and appropriate training through the Housing Executive's Digital Inclusion Initiative.

Warden Service in the Limavady and Coleraine Borough Council Areas

Mr A McQuillan asked the Minister for Social Development what discussions the Housing Executive has had with (i) Limavady Borough Council; and (ii) Coleraine Borough Council concerning the provision of a warden service in their rural estates and surrounding areas. (AQW 5505/10)

Minister for Social Development: The Housing Executive is currently working in partnership with Limavady Borough Council and other stakeholders to provide a Night time Warden Service. The wardens work mainly at the weekends in estates identified by the PSNI as having the highest need. The Warden Service is monitored by the Steering Group consisting of the stakeholders and if a need is determined by PSNI or any other stakeholder for other areas including rural areas, the wardens can be redeployed as required. The Housing Executive has not had any discussions with Coleraine Borough Council regarding the provision of a warden service in rural areas or estates. There is currently one Estate Warden employed in the Coleraine District, originally to deal with the Ballysally Estate, but their duties have been widened to take in some other estates in Coleraine and Portrush.

Registered Charity

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the procedure for a charity to become registered under the new legislation; and what criteria must be met to become a registered charity. (AQW 5527/10)

Minister for Social Development: The Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008 requires that every institution, which is a charity under the law of Northern Ireland, must be registered in the register of charities which will be kept by the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland.

In order to comply with the Charity Test, an organisation must have one or more charitable purposes as outlined in Section 2 (2) of the Act. In addition, the Charity Commission must be satisfied that the body meets the public benefit test.

The Charity Commission is currently developing an online register together with advice and guidance notes. Hard copy forms will also be available for completion.

Subject to the necessary enabling legislation being passed in Westminster, it is intended that HM Revenue and Customs will transfer the records they hold for charities who have sought tax relief status, to the Charity Commission. This database will be used to contact those bodies and invite them to complete registration details. For bodies that have not sought charitable tax reliefs with HM Revenue and Customs and are therefore not on the list, the Charity Commission will work with network bodies, use advertising and promotion and other available databases to invite all charities to register.

Registration is likely to start from May 2010 on a phased basis, starting with organisations with a gross income of over £500k and working in subsequent phases to register charities in the bands £101k to £500k and finally those with income of £100k or less.

It is appreciated that it may take some time for all charities here to become aware of their responsibility to register and how to do so. The target would be to have the majority of charities on the register by the end of 2010.

It should be noted that under the new Charities Act it is a legal obligation for all charities to register without exception.

Masterplan for the Harbour Area

Ms C Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Social Development what discussions she has had with the Belfast Harbour Commission regarding (i) plans to provide social housing; and (ii) her Department's draft Masterplan for the harbour area.

(AQW 5534/10)

Minister for Social Development: Officials from my Department and the Housing Executive have met with Belfast Harbour Commission to discuss both the issue of social housing and the draft masterplan for the Harbour area.

In September 2009, Housing Executive staff met with representatives of the consultancy team commissioned by Belfast Harbour Commission to undertake the City Quays Master Planning exercise.

It is the Housing Executive's view that mixed tenure housing as indicated on the concept layout could be supported as an integral part of the mixed use draft development plan.

Officials from my Department have also met with the Chief Executive and Commercial Director of Belfast Harbour Commission to discuss the emerging draft masterplan for the Greater Clarendon (Sailorstown) area.

Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan

Ms C Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Social Development if she, or her Department, has had any discussions with (i) the Minister of the Environment; and (ii) the Planning Service, regarding the change in the zone definition for social housing in Nelson Street that occurred in the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan.

(AQW 5535/10)

Minister for Social Development: There has been no change in the zone definition for social housing in Nelson Street as outlined in the draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan.

Scottish and Northern Ireland Plumbing Employers' Federation

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development if she has had any discussions with the Scottish and Northern Ireland Plumbing Employers' Federation to enable the plumbing sector to take advantage of any boiler scrappage scheme.

(AQW 5544/10)

Minister for Social Development: The Director of the Scottish and Northern Ireland Plumbing Employers' Federation wrote to Arlene Foster MLA, Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Investment about the boiler scrappage scheme. As my Department is responsible for domestic energy efficiency the letter was passed to me for reply.

Officials replied to the Director of SNIPEF saying that the boiler scrappage scheme announced by the Chancellor in his Pre-Budget Report would not apply in Northern Ireland.

State Pension Increase

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development what discussions she has had with Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs to ensure that the state pension increase is not subject to tax that would negate any monetary advantage of the pension increase.

(AQW 5545/10)

Minister for Social Development: Taxation is an excepted matter under the Northern Ireland Act 1998. I have had no discussions with Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs in relation to the taxation of the increase in the State Pension.

However no pensioner whose sole income is State Pension or State Pension Credit will be liable for income tax on the increase in their pension.

Co-ownership Scheme

Mr A McQuillan asked the Minister for Social Development how many applications were made to the Co-ownership scheme; and how many homes have been purchased through the scheme, in the 2009/10 financial year.

(AQW 5560/10)

Minister for Social Development: In the period 1 April 2009 to 11 March 2010, a total of 1051 applications were received by the Northern Ireland Co-Ownership Housing Association and 441 homes were purchased through the Co-Ownership scheme.

Private Rented Accommodation

Mr A McQuillan asked the Minister for Social Development what her Department is doing to address the problem of private rented accommodation which is unfit to live in.

(AQW 5561/10)

Minister for Social Development: Under the Private Tenancies (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 any property built before 1945 with a tenancy commencing after April 2007, must have a fitness certificate (unless exempt). Those properties that do not have fitness certificates are subject to rent control. This means the landlord is prevented from charging a market rent until the property is made fit.

Subcontractors Employed on Social Housing Building Projects

Ms M Anderson asked the Minister for Social Development what measures are in place to ensure that proper terms and conditions are offered to subcontractors employed on social housing building projects.

(AQW 5564/10)

Minister for Social Development: The Procurement Strategy for the Social Housing Development Programme will ensure that the procurement of social housing will embrace construction procurement best practice including the recent proposals of the Construction Industry Forum (CIFNI) Procurement Task Group Report Addendum. It is anticipated that these proposals will be fully effective within the social housing sector later this year.

Flats at Rathmullan Drive in the Scrabo Estate, Newtownards

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister for Social Development what plans there are to develop the block of flats at Rathmullan Drive in the Scrabo Estate, Newtownards; and what is the timescale for any redevelopment.

(AQW 5566/10)

Minister for Social Development: The Housing Executive has prepared an Economic Appraisal outlining a number of options regarding the future of these flats. That Appraisal is now undergoing technical

assessment within my Department and subject to the findings of that assessment; I expect to be able to make an announcement in the coming weeks.

Replacement Kitchens in East Londonderry

Mr A McQuillan asked the Minister for Social Development how many replacement kitchens the Housing Executive has fitted in the East Londonderry constituency in the 2009/10 financial year.
(AQW 5604/10)

Minister for Social Development: The information is not available in the format requested. However, the Housing Executive replaced 103 kitchens in its Coleraine and Limavady District Office areas in 2009/10.

Multi-element Scheme for Woodend Park in Articlave, Coleraine

Mr A McQuillan asked the Minister for Social Development when a full Multi-element Scheme will be in place for Woodend Park in Articlave, Coleraine.
(AQW 5605/10)

Minister for Social Development: As the budget has not yet been agreed for 2010/11, there are as yet no Multi Element Improvement schemes planned in 2010/11.

Rental Agreements

Mr A McQuillan asked the Minister for Social Development if her Department offers any guidance and advice to landlords and private tenants on their rental agreements.
(AQW 5606/10)

Minister for Social Development: My Department's website contains a large amount of guidance and advice for landlords and private tenants, including a model tenancy agreement, a Statement of Tenancy Terms and a template for a rent book. This information is supplemented by practical guides for private landlords and tenants which have been made widely available. In addition my officials, in conjunction with local councils, have also recently been delivering awareness sessions for private landlords as part of my strategy for the private rented sector. Further awareness sessions are planned.

Housing Executive Properties: Heating

Mr F Cobain asked the Minister for Social Development (i) how many Housing Executive properties, still reliant on (a) Economy 7; and (b) basic electricity, have natural gas potentially available within their locality, broken down by Housing Executive area; (ii) what the average cost per dwelling is of installing natural gas; and (iii) if she is aware of the savings tenants could make as a result of switching to gas.
(AQW 5611/10)

Minister for Social Development: It is difficult to be specific about the precise locations where natural gas is available or will become available. There may also be some dwellings in areas where gas is available but which are outside the main District town and so may not be on the gas network. However, in relation to (i) the table below shows the number of Housing Executive properties which still have Economy 7, basic electricity heating, by Housing Executive District Office area, and whether natural gas is available.

Housing Executive District Office Area	*Economy 7/ basic electricity heating	Natural Gas available? (Yes / No)
West Belfast	471	Yes
East Belfast	473	Yes
South Belfast	390	Yes

Housing Executive District Office Area	*Economy 7/ basic electricity heating	Natural Gas available? (Yes / No)
North Belfast	859	Yes
Shankill	302	Yes
Ballymena	512	Yes
Antrim	278	Yes
Newtownabbey 1	439	Yes
Newtownabbey 2	292	Yes
Carrickfergus	154	Yes
Larne	255	Yes
Ballycastle	11	No
Ballymoney	91	Yes
Coleraine	523	Yes
Banbridge	96	Yes
Newry	264	Yes
Armagh	195	Yes
Lurgan Brownlow	541	Yes
Portadown	315	Yes
Dungannon	109	No
Fermanagh	140	No
Bangor	559	Yes
Newtownards	440	Yes
Castlereagh	1077	Yes
Lisburn Antrim	634	Yes
Lisburn Dairyfarm	34	Yes
Downpatrick	339	No
Waterloo Place	226	Yes
Waterside	216	Yes
Collon Terrace	312	Yes
Limavady	145	Yes
Magherafelt	53	No
Strabane	17	No
Omagh	84	No
Cookstown	57	No

In relation to (ii) the average cost of installing gas in Housing Executive properties that previously had Economy 7 basic electricity is £5,204. In relation to (iii) the average cost saving for a property moving from Economy 7 basic electricity to natural gas is £193 per year.

Note:

- * There is no difference between Economy 7 and basic electricity heating other than the size of the system as basic electricity is a smaller form of the standard Economy 7 heating system.

Housing Executive Properties: Heating

Mr F Cobain asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the environmental benefits of Housing Executive properties, still reliant on (i) Economy 7; and (ii) basic electricity for heating, switching their fuel source to natural gas; and how any carbon emission savings from such a switch could be quantified.

(AQW 5612/10)

Minister for Social Development: The Housing Executive's heating replacement scheme aim is to switch from inefficient fuels like solid fuel and electricity to systems such as natural gas and oil which provide the following environmental benefits:

- they are more energy efficient; and
- are less polluting.

The typical carbon savings for a Housing Executive property switching from Economy 7 to natural gas is 2119kgCO₂/year per property. This is an average figure collated over the last three years based on data using Reduced Data Standard Assessment Procedures (RdSAP) which is used to calculate energy usages on the Energy Performance Certificates.

Carers Allowance

Mr A Ross asked the Minister for Social Development how many people in the East Antrim constituency have correctly claimed carers allowance in each of the last five years.

(AQW 5613/10)

Minister for Social Development: The table below details how many people in the East Antrim constituency have successfully claimed Carers Allowance in each of the last five calendar years.

Year	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Number of Successful Carers Allowance Claims	407	332	424	466	404

Small Pockets of Deprivation Programme

Mr A Ross asked the Minister for Social Development what funding will be available for East Antrim under the Small Pockets of Deprivation programme in the 2010 / 2011 financial year.

(AQW 5614/10)

Minister for Social Development: There are two groups eligible to apply for SPOD funding in the East Antrim constituency, these are; the Carrickfergus Community Forum and Bawnmore and District Residents' Association. The NIHE, on behalf of DSD has met with representatives of the Carrickfergus group who will be submitting an application before 31 March 2010; and are likely to be awarded salary and running costs. A meeting has also taken place with the Bawnmore group on 15 March 2010 and they are currently being assisted with the preparation of an application for running costs only. Upon receipt of the formal applications a decision will be taken on the level of funding to be awarded to each group.

Boiler Scrappage Scheme

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Social Development if any money has been allocated from central Government for a proposed boiler scrappage scheme.

(AQW 5622/10)

Minister for Social Development: The Chancellor of the Exchequer announced funding for a Greener Boiler Incentive in England during his 2009 Pre-Budget Report (PBR) statement on 9 December 2009.

Although the majority of the funding for this scheme came from a reprioritisation of the existing budget allocation for the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, an additional allocation of £20 million was made to the department as part of the PBR.

As a consequence of this decision, the Northern Ireland Executive received £0.7 million in additional capital funding for 2010-11, through the Barnett formula.

However, any and all allocations received from the Barnett Formula are available to the Executive to spend in correspondence with local needs and priorities.

As part of the Review of 2010-11 Spending Plans, the Executive has proposed that all the additional Barnett consequentials from the 2009 PBR are used to offset the spending pressures for 2010-11.

Sale of Land

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how much land her Department aims to sell in the 2010/11 financial year.

(AQW 5624/10)

Minister for Social Development: The scope to sell land falls to the Urban Regeneration Group of the Department. There is a budget requirement to achieve £13 million in capital receipts in 2010-11 and the Urban Group intends disposing of land to achieve this target.

Benefit Entitlements

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Social Development for her assessment of her Department's efforts to ensure that all people who are entitled to benefits are claiming them.

(AQW 5626/10)

Minister for Social Development: My Department takes significant steps in providing a wide 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.

In addition, 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; a substantial amount available to go back into the economy.

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.

The deployment of new IT has also aided benefit uptake. For example, enhanced telephony under the Pensions Transformation Programme has resulted in approximately 90% of claims being taken by telephone and when a customer calls to make a claim to State Pension, they are also asked if they would like to find out more about Pension Credit. If the customer is interested they are transferred to a dedicated State Pension Credit claim line.

Girdwood Site in North Belfast

Ms C Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the 200 new social homes that she announced would be built on the Girdwood site in North Belfast.

(AQW 5632/10)

Minister for Social Development: As part of the wider Masterplan being developed for the Girdwood site, I have asked the Housing Executive to appoint a Housing Association to take forward the development of 200 new social and affordable homes, subject to securing the necessary approvals.

The first 100 units are provisionally planned to start in 2011/12 and the second phase of another 100 units are provisionally planned to commence in 2012/13.

Transfer of Functions

Ms C Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Social Development (i) what discussions her Department has had to date with local councils in preparation for the transfer of functions; and (ii) what equality mechanisms she will put in place for the transfer of budgets to local government.

(AQW 5634/10)

Minister for Social Development: My Department has been fully engaged with the various regional and sub-regional bodies and structures established by the Minister of the Environment to implement Ministers' decisions on the Review of Public Administration. At a local level, this engagement includes the Department being represented on the Transition Management Teams set up under the 11 Transition Committees to implement change within each new local Council area.

DSD proposes to transfer very significant functions to local government including Urban Regeneration and Community Development.

A range of budgets will be transferred to the new local Councils. My Department will consider any equality issues pertinent to each of these as part of the normal process of policy development and in the context of the forthcoming Spending Round outturn.

Cross-border Benefit Fraud

Mr T Burns asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 5329/10, to detail the sum total of benefits fraudulently claimed by these individuals.

(AQW 5642/10)

Minister for Social Development: The table below shows details of the sum total of benefits fraudulently claimed by the individuals detailed in AQW 5329/10. Information is only held in respect of the last 3 years plus the current year.

Year	2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009 – 3 March 2010
Sum Total of Benefits Fraudulently Claimed	£154,554	£177,193	£262,412	£152,113

People Aged 65 and Over in receipt of Attendance Allowance and Pension Credit

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister for Social Development how many people aged 65 and over are currently in receipt of (i) Attendance Allowance; and (ii) Pension Credit, broken down by religious background.

(AQW 5650/10)

Minister for Social Development: The information requested is not held by my Department as data relating to religious or community background for benefit recipients is not collected.

At February 2010, there were:

57,845 people aged 65 or over in receipt of Attendance Allowance, and

80,098 people aged 65 or over in receipt of State Pension Credit.

The information provided is derived from 100% un-validated Attendance Allowance and State Pension Credit scans and the verified data is not available until September 2010.

Housing Executive Waiting List

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister for Social Development how many people aged 65 and over are on the Housing Executive waiting list in each local government district, broken down by religious background.

(AQW 5655/10)

Minister for Social Development: The information is not available in the format requested. However, the table below details the number of applicants aged 65 and over on the waiting list, broken down by religious background, by Housing Executive District Office area, at 30 September 2009:-

Housing Executive District Office	Catholic	Protestant	Other	Unknown/ Undisclosed
Belfast East	10	349	15	35
Belfast North	104	93	7	64
Belfast South	54	114	20	33
Belfast West	187	<5	5	20
Shankill	<5	134	0	6
Antrim	42	40	22	7
Ballycastle	9	11	<5	9
Ballymena	13	166	9	63
Ballymoney	8	34	<5	12
Carrickfergus	11	239	8	30
Coleraine	25	119	16	26
Larne	15	55	<5	13
N'abbey 1	10	107	8	17
N'abbey 2	<5	159	7	13
Armagh	38	31	5	10
Banbridge	25	72	<5	19
Dungannon	24	29	-	12
Fermanagh	68	38	8	9
Lurgan	85	62	7	7
Newry	105	16	<5	33
Portadown	12	70	5	7
Bangor	25	431	44	95
Castlereagh	<5	225	10	31

Housing Executive District Office	Catholic	Protestant	Other	Unknown/ Undisclosed
Downpatrick	58	52	24	39
Lisburn Antrim St	30	286	16	50
Lisburn Dairy Farm	10	-	-	-
Newtownards	20	208	35	36
Cookstown	21	27	<5	<5
Derry 1	67	<5	<5	5
Derry 2	31	50	6	10
Derry 3	61	-	-	<5
Limavady	10	20	<5	12
Magherafelt	11	19	5	6
Omagh	39	24	<5	7
Strabane	33	18	-	5

Note

<5 = where there are less than 5 applicants these are not identified for Data protection purposes and to prevent identification of the individual applicant

Housing Executive Maintenance Programmes

Mr J Craig asked the Minister for Social Development to list the Housing Executive maintenance programmes scheduled for the (i) Lisburn office; and (ii) the Dairy Farm office, in the 2010/11 financial year.

(AQW 5657/10)

Minister for Social Development: The schemes listed below are currently included in the Housing Executive's draft programme for 2010/11. 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 have been confirmed.

Lisburn (Antrim Street):-

- Knockmore Heating Replacement
- Seymour Hill Phase 2 Heating Replacement
- Miltown/Barnfield External Cyclical Maintenance
- Rushmore/Knockburn External Cyclical Maintenance
- Hilden & Low Road External Cyclical Maintenance

Lisburn (Dairy Farm):

- Colinvale Heating Replacement
- Colinvale/Glendowan External Cyclical Maintenance

Community Care Grants

Mr J Craig asked the Minister for Social Development how many applications were submitted for Community Care grants in the Lagan Valley constituency; and how many of these were successful, in each of the last two years.

(AQW 5658/10)

Minister for Social Development: This information is not recorded in the format requested.

Winter Fuel Payment

Ms M Anderson asked the Minister for Social Development what steps she has taken to persuade the Minister for Work and Pensions to have the Winter Fuel Payment extended to cancer sufferers in line with the Macmillan campaign.

(AQW 5667/10)

Minister for Social Development: I recognise that people with cancer can face extra costs as a result of their condition but people suffering from many other life limiting illnesses face the same financial challenges. I consider that it would be unfair to single out those suffering from a particular illness for special consideration. It is more equitable to ensure that the extent of an individual's need for personal care is addressed, rather than one medical category.

My Department currently addresses this need through the provision of a range of social security benefits including Disability Living Allowance, Attendance Allowance and Employment and Support Allowance. In addition, people aged 60 and over who are suffering from cancer or any other illness or disability can benefit from the Winter Fuel Payment scheme.

However I will include eligibility for Winter Fuel Payments as one of many topics I will cover in future discussions with the UK Minister responsible for the benefits system.

New Jobs and Benefits Office for Newtownards

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on plans for a new Jobs and Benefits Office for Newtownards.

(AQW 5672/10)

Minister for Social Development: Plans for the delivery of a Jobs & Benefits office on a new site in Newtownards are being progressed and a site is currently being explored within the Castlebawn development but this will be subject to successful procurement. Outline plans for the office are being developed to allow a planning application to be submitted. Whilst there is no definite date for delivery of the Newtownards Jobs & Benefits office, the current planning assumptions would suggest that the earliest date for the start of construction is March 2011. Delivery will be subject to the availability of funding beyond the current Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) window ending March 2011.

Housing Associations

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister for Social Development whether Housing Associations can only purchase built dwellings which are smaller than 115 sq metres; and to outline the reason for this rule, and how it can be changed.

(AQW 5718/10)

Minister for Social Development: To the contrary there is no such rule stipulating that housing associations can only purchase built dwellings which are smaller than 115 sq metres. In fact, housing associations can and often acquire homes that exceed this size standard. This is particularly the case when a home is being acquired for a family with specific needs. The space standards in those homes will be dictated by the needs of the individual and supported by Occupational Therapist assessment.

Co-ownership Schemes

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister for Social Development whether there have been any changes to the selection process that determines who can access co-ownership; and if there have been any changes to how the scheme is funded.

(AQW 5719/10)

Minister for Social Development: Responsibility for the administration of the Co-Ownership Scheme rests with the Northern Ireland Co-Ownership Housing Association. In April 2009, in response to a substantial increase in the volume of applications to the scheme, the Northern Ireland Co-Ownership Housing Association introduced a monthly quota system to manage demand throughout the financial year. This monthly cap may flex up or down throughout the year to take account of both the level of applications received as well as completions; it is essential to prevent the scheme from becoming oversubscribed and, as a result, being unable to accept or process new applications on an ongoing basis.

In November 2009, an innovative funding arrangement was put in place for the Co-Ownership scheme. Alongside core funding from the Department for Social Development, totalling £15m annually, the Bank of Ireland and Barclays Bank have provided a facility of up to £48m which should deliver some 1,500 affordable homes through the Co-Ownership scheme over a 3 year period ending 31 March 2012.

Co-ownership Schemes

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister for Social Development if the construction industry is permitted to form co-ownership schemes.

(AQW 5720/10)

Minister for Social Development: In launching the New Housing Agenda in 2008, I stated the belief that an important element in delivering extra social and affordable housing to address need and demand would be the involvement of developers through a number of mechanisms, including the provision of shared equity or shared ownership schemes.

Developers may offer shared equity or shared ownership schemes if they wish and I would encourage them, where possible, to deliver such initiatives, offering more people the opportunity to gain a first step on the housing ladder.

Rising Cost of Fuel

Mr G Savage asked the Minister for Social Development for her assessment of the impact on families of the rising cost of fuel.

(AQW 5741/10)

Minister for Social Development: I am very aware that the rising cost of fuel is causing difficulties for many families throughout Northern Ireland. Government influence on fuel prices is limited as fuel prices are determined largely by world markets. In response to the rise in fuel prices my department made a one-off Household Fuel Payment of £150 to almost 167,000 vulnerable households.

I am committed to tackling fuel poverty and making a real difference and this year my department will spend £27 million improving the energy efficiency of vulnerable households through the Warm Homes Scheme and the Housing Executive's Heating Replacement Scheme. I am delighted to report that we are on track to meet our Public Service Agreement target of assisting 9,000 households with energy efficiency measures. The introduction of Working Tax Credit as a qualifying benefit for the Warm Homes Scheme has meant that for the first time families with young children can access a range of heating measures available under the scheme.

Alongside these schemes my department also administers on Benefit Uptake campaign to encourage people to claim their full benefit entitlement, makes Cold Weather Payments to qualifying persons and administers the Winter Fuel Payment to all persons aged 60 or over.

My officials are preparing a consultation document on a new Fuel Poverty Strategy for Northern Ireland. This document will seek comment on proposed changes to the 2004 strategy and will set out a range of proposals for tackling fuel poverty in the future.

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Friday 2 April 2010

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Departmental Posts: Relocation and Decentralisation

Mr D McKay asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what consideration they have given to posts within their Department that could be relocated or decentralised.

(AQW 5259/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister (Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness): The majority of posts within the Department are located in and around Belfast, with a small number of posts located in Armagh and Derry/Londonderry.

The Executive is still to consider a paper in relation to the Bain Review on the Location of Public Sector jobs. The decentralisation/relocation of posts within the Department is still under consideration.

Funding to Tackle Racism

Ms C Ní Chuilín asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the funding distributed by their Department to tackle racism across Belfast, broken down by the four Belfast constituencies, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 5370/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: In each of the last three financial years, OFMDFM has awarded funding to organisations in the four Belfast constituencies under the Minority Ethnic Development Fund as shown in the table below. The Minority Ethnic Development Fund supports work which contributes to the promotion of good relations, community cohesion, and integration between people from different racial groups, thus helping to tackle racism.

2007-08 MINORITY ETHNIC DEVELOPMENT FUND

Belfast East	Belfast North	Belfast South	Belfast West	Total
-	-	£ 215,000.00	£ 137,571.23	£ 352,571.23

2008-09 MINORITY ETHNIC DEVELOPMENT FUND

Belfast East	Belfast North	Belfast South	Belfast West	Total
£ 38,000	£ 15,000	£ 405,000	£ 120,000	£ 578,000

2009-10 MINORITY ETHNIC DEVELOPMENT FUND

Belfast East	Belfast North	Belfast South	Belfast West	Total
£ 38,000	£ 75,000	£ 389,764	£ 150,000	£ 652,764

Direct geographical criteria do not form part of the criteria for awarding funding under the scheme; the criteria are need-based. This has resulted in a spread of organisations to be funded which broadly aligns with the location of the minority ethnic population here and from where many of the applications for funding originate, which is in the South Belfast constituency. However, it should be noted that many of the successful organisations operate on a regional basis, or will deliver projects at a regional level. This means that they provide support and guidance to those outside the constituency in which their headquarters are located, across all of Belfast and in many cases Northern Ireland. We recognise and value the vital roles played by minority ethnic groups, and those who support them, with work on the ground.

It is hoped that Junior Ministers will make an official announcement on the successful applicants of the 2010-11 Minority Ethnic Development Fund in the forthcoming weeks.

Apology for Child Migrants Programme

Ms M Anderson asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) if they are aware of the British Prime Minister's apology for the Child Migrants Programme, under which 150,000 children between the ages of 3-14 were sent to Commonwealth countries where many of them were abused and forced into slave labour; (ii) how many of these children were born on the island of Ireland; and (iii) if they will make a statement on this matter.

(AQW 5472/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: We are aware of the apology made by Gordon Brown on 24 February for the Child Migrant Programme of the UK Government and indeed welcome the resultant establishment of the Family Restoration Fund.

Whilst inquiries into the programme were led by the House of Commons and data is held at Westminster, the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety has examined the statistics and background. Hence we understand between 1938 and 1956, Roman Catholic agencies sent a total of 1109 children from the UK to Australia, 103 of whom are known to have come from Roman Catholic agencies here. However, even after considerable work, these figures are an estimate and it is difficult to identify true numbers with limited records available.

We do not intend to make a statement on this matter but are aware that the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety will be discussing the Restoration Fund and how it will operate here with the NIO and the Department of Health in London.

Public Perceptions of the Executive Opinion Poll

Mr D Kennedy asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, in relation to the 'Public Perceptions of the Executive' opinion poll, (i) when this report was commissioned; (ii) when their Department received the report; (iii) to outline the tendering process, including the number of companies that were approached to conduct the research; (iv) if the departmental Accounting Officer signed off on the expenditure; (v) if any other Department was consulted on the poll; (vi) if the report was circulated to any other Department or Minister; (vii) under which duty their Department deemed the poll necessary; and (viii) when, and to whom, the report was distributed.

(AQW 5602/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister:

- (i) At the Executive meeting on 11 February, Ministers considered the work programmes arising out of the Agreement. Community consultation was recognised as an important part of the process and Ministers were advised that the Executive Information Service would examine the most appropriate channels to raise public awareness. It is important that we gauge public perception of the work of the Executive. This will help inform our future work on how we communicate with the public. EIS was asked to commission this research and given the impact of the Hillsborough Castle Agreement on the work of OFMDFM, it was appropriate that this research should also address the issue of Policing and Justice. The research company was given final approval to proceed with the poll on 18 February.

- (ii) The report was received by the Executive Information Service on Thursday evening 4 March and was forwarded to our offices on Friday 5 March for consideration.
- (iii) Given the short timescale involved, the only option was to proceed with a single tender action.
- (iv) Given the timescale, the Departmental Accounting Officer was asked to approve a single tender action and the expenditure. This was received on 16 February.
- (v)&(vi) Given the timescale involved, it was not possible to consult other departments on the poll. A copy of the research report was sent to all Ministers on Monday 8 March.
- (vii) As Chairs of the Executive, it was entirely appropriate for us to assess public opinion on the work of the Executive. It is essential that we and our Executive colleagues have an accurate, independent assessment of how the public perceive the work of the Executive.
- (viii) A copy of the report went to Ministerial colleagues on Monday 8 March and was also sent to Departmental Principal Information Officers by EIS on the same day.

Projects Supporting Victims and Survivors

Mr A Ross asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail any funding distributed by their Department for projects supporting victims and survivors in the East Antrim constituency in each of the last 3 years.

(AQW 5615/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: The Development Grant Scheme funds projects to address the needs of victims and survivors. In excess of 400 projects were funded last year through 110 groups. Any group can apply for this funding. No group in East Antrim has applied for funding through this scheme in the last three years.

Racism in North Down

Mr P Weir asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the funding distributed by their Department to tackle racism in North Down in each of the last three years.

(AQW 5621/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: OFMDFM's Community Relations Unit has provided annual funding to North Down Borough Council of £53,295 (for 2007/08), £55,959.75 (for 2009/10) and £58,757.74 (for 2009/10) through its Good Relations Programme. This funding supports the Council in its efforts to tackle both sectarianism and racism, which have been highlighted in the Council's Good Relations Action Plan.

OFMDFM's Minority Ethnic Development Fund (MEDF) also awards funding to organisations to promote good relations, community cohesion and integration between people from different racial groups, thus helping to tackle racism.

While no organisation with headquarters in the North Down constituency has been successful in applying for this Fund in the last three years, many of the successful organisations operate on a regional basis, or will deliver projects at a regional level. This means that they provide support and guidance to those outside the constituency in which their headquarters are located, including North Down.

Implementation Plan Steering Group of the Sustainable Development Strategy

Mr D Ford asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the criteria for selecting members to the Implementation Plan Steering Group of the Sustainable Development Strategy.

(AQW 5630/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: The Sustainable Development Strategy Implementation Plan Steering Group has been established to meet a strategic need for engagement with the different sectors of our society in the development of the Implementation Plan.

To fulfil this role the group needs to have particular characteristics: its members must be capable of acting in a representative capacity on behalf of their sectors; it must give access to all critical stakeholder sectors in the sustainable development field; and it must be of a size that permits efficient working. Building on the department's past experience in working with similar representative groups in this area we decided that a small group with a strong capacity to reach out and represent the various interests of the wider community would be most effective.

The members of the Implementation Plan Steering Group have agreed, in taking up membership, to undertake a representative role within their respective sectors. This has allowed us to strike the best balance between keeping the group small enough to be efficient while being capable of effectively representing the broad range of interests within the ambit of the Sustainable Development Strategy.

Projects in the North Belfast Constituency

Ms C Ní Chuilín asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the projects they have initiated, or funded, in the North Belfast constituency since May 2007
(AQW 5631/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: OFMDFM funds a range of projects across the North Belfast constituency. 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. The information relates only to voluntary and community sector projects which have been initiated or funded and does not include any physical redevelopment projects e.g. development of the Crumlin Road Gaol.

Through the North Belfast Community Action Unit (NBCAU), OFMDFM provided the following amounts for community capacity building projects in North Belfast:

07/08	08/09	09/10
£2.3m	£2.4m	£1.6m

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 specifically to North Belfast groups over the last 2 years is as follows

07/08	08/09
£201K	£351K

Belfast City Council also received the following funding from our District Councils Community Relations Programme to undertake a range of good relations programmes specifically in North Belfast.

07/08	08/09	09/10
£50K	£64K	£50K

OFMDFM has provided funding specifically for summer intervention diversionary activity in North Belfast. Total amounts provided since 2007 are summarised as follows.

07/08	08/09	09/10
£79K	£140K	£113K

A further £40K was provided to the Belfast Education and Library Board for North Belfast summer intervention work in 2009.

In 2008, through the North Belfast Community Action Unit in partnership with the Community Relations Council, OFMDFM initiated the formation of the Hazelwood Community Partnership. The aim of this

inter-agency project is to support the community in building good relations by delivering practical responses to all issues arising from community tensions in the greater Whitewell area and ensuring good local partnership working between community and statutory agencies.

Good Relations Strategy

Mr C McDevitt asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, in light of the murder of Shaun Fitzpatrick, for their assessment of whether the Good Relations strategy should be extended to include other minority groups, including the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community, and people with disabilities.

(AQW 5666/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: One of the goals of the Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration is to build a strong community where everyone, regardless of race, colour, religious or political opinion, age, gender, disability or sexual orientation can live, work, rest and socialise in a context of fairness, equality, rights, responsibilities and respect.

Furthermore, the Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration will provide a framework for the delivery of our objectives and will translate the vision, policy and strategic priorities into tangible actions. While this programme focuses on tackling sectarianism and racist attitudes and behaviours, it also affirms that all manifestations of intolerance, such as harassment, discrimination, prejudice or hate crime are unacceptable in our society. We strongly repudiate and condemn attacks on people on any basis, including on the basis of age, disability, race, sexual orientation or gender. We will seek to ensure that the principles in this Programme are reflected within the initiatives and policies for these sectors of our community.

Single Equality Bill

Mr D Kennedy asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQW 5269/10, if there was ever a Single Equality Bill team; and when and why it was disbanded.

(AQW 5721/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: We can confirm that the Department has in the past had a small team of people working on developing options for a Single Equality Bill. The team was responsible for conducting two public consultations in 2001 and 2004 and for holding a further round of pre-consultation discussions with key stakeholders in 2007. Some of the staff involved in the development of the Single Equality Bill continue to be involved in equality legislation.

Committee of the Regions of the European Union

Mr D McNarry asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the attendance level of each Northern Ireland member of the Committee of the Regions of the European Union at both Plenary and other Commission meetings, since their appointments.

(AQW 5735/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: The table below details Northern Ireland's Committee of the Regions (CoR) members and their attendance levels since the Committee's current mandate began on 9 February 2010 (information current to 22 March 2010).

CoR Member	Type of Membership	CoR Commission	Plenary Sessions		Commission Meetings	
			Number Attended	Number open to each Member*	Number Attended	Number open to each Member**
Cllr Jonathan Bell MLA	Full Member	Territorial Cohesion (COTER)	1	1	3	3***
Francie Molloy MLA	Full Member	Environment, Climate Change & Energy (ENVE)	1	1	1	2
Cllr Arnold Hatch	Alternate Member	Natural Resources (NAT)	0	0	1	1
John Dallat MLA	Alternate Member	Education and Culture (EDUC)	0	0	0	1

* Alternates may only attend a CoR Plenary session if their full member is not attending.

** The first Commission meetings took place during the inaugural Plenary session and were therefore not attended by alternate members.

*** Jonathan Bell attended an Economic and Social Policy (ECOS) Commission meeting on 24 February as a substitute for a Welsh member.

The formal record of attendance is found in the published Minutes of each meeting, found on the Committee's website (<https://toad.cor.europa.eu/>). As some of the formal records are not yet available, the table above contains informal records held by the Committee of the Regions' Brussels-based Secretariat and the United Kingdom's Local Government Association.

Rising Cost of Fuel

Mr G Savage asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what discussions the Executive has had regarding the rising cost of fuel.

(AQW 5740/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: It is not our practice to disclose details of Executive business. The content of Executive papers and all aspects of Executive business are confidential.

Projects Supporting Victims and Survivors

Mr J Craig asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail any funding distributed by their Department for projects supporting victims and survivors in the Lagan Valley constituency in each of the last 3 years.

(AQW 5762/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: In the last three years, OFMDFM has provided the following funding for projects supporting victims and survivors in the Lagan Valley area:

2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
£30,894	£35,780	£38,513

Project funding is made available to any group seeking to work with victims and survivors by way of open applications to the Community Relations Council, who distribute the funding on behalf of OFMDFM.

Racism in the Lagan Valley Constituency

Mr J Craig asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the funding distributed by their Department to tackle racism in the Lagan Valley constituency in each of the last three years.

(AQW 5764/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: OFMDFM's Community Relations Unit has provided annual funding to Lisburn City Council of £48,005.00 (for 2007/08), £50,405.25 (for 2008/09) and £52,925.51 (for 2009/10) through its Good Relations Programme. This funding supports the Council in its efforts to tackle both sectarianism and racism, which have been highlighted in the Council's Good Relations Action Plan.

OFMDFM's Minority Ethnic Development Fund also awards funding to organisations to promote good relations, community cohesion and integration between people from different racial groups, thus helping to tackle racism.

Through the Minority Ethnic Development Fund, OFMDFM has awarded a total of £74,278 to the Old Warren Partnership in the Lagan Valley constituency over the last two years. This total comprises an award of £43,278 in the 2009/10 financial year and an award of £31,000 in the 2008/09 financial year. No organisation from the Lagan Valley constituency successfully applied for funding in the 2007/08 financial year.

Note that many of the organisations who are awarded funding from the Minority Ethnic Development Fund operate on a regional basis, or deliver projects at a regional level. This means that they provide support and guidance to people outside the constituency in which their headquarters are located, including the Lagan Valley constituency.

Presbyterian Mutual Society

Rev Dr R Coulter asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the current situation in relation to the Presbyterian Mutual Society.

(AQO 1000/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: The Member will be aware that in June 2009 Prime Minister Gordon Brown established a working group with representatives from HM Treasury and the Departments of Finance and Personnel (DFP) and Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) to bring forward a series of proposals to reach a solution to the PMS problem.

Following an encouraging meeting of the Ministerial Working Group in October 2009 when we, along with our Ministerial colleagues, Arlene Foster and Sammy Wilson, met with the Chief Secretary of the Treasury, senior officials both here and in HM Treasury have been looking at a number of options for dealing with the crisis. Indeed, we have also met directly with the Prime Minister on a number of occasions over recent months in an effort to progress the issue. As has been well documented, finding a remedy to the PMS problem has proven to be a complex matter and there remains a number of challenging issues to resolve. This has meant that the work on a solution has taken longer than expected. However, we are expecting to be presented with the full report on final considerations and options from officials soon.

St Patrick's Day Visit to the White House

Mr T Burns asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail (i) the total costs incurred as a result of the trip to the White House on St Patrick's Day 2010; (ii) how this money was spent; and (iii) the Assembly or Government officials who went on this trip.

(AQW 5846/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: We undertook a full week's programme in the US including multiple engagements in Chicago, Washington, New York and Houston. It is not possible to extrapolate the costs relating specifically to attending the events in the White House on St Patrick's Day.

We met with the President, the Vice President, Secretary of State Clinton and the National Security Adviser in the White House on St Patrick's Day. We were each accompanied by a special adviser as well as the Head of the Civil Service and the Director of the Northern Ireland Bureau in Washington. These officials also supported us at the White House St Patrick's Day reception later that evening.

St Patrick's Night Dinner Hosted by President Obama in Washington

Mr P J Bradley asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the people and organisations, that their office in Washington is aware of, who represented Northern Ireland's interests at the 2010 St Patrick's night dinner hosted in Washington by President Obama.

(AQW 5902/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: Invitations to attend the evening reception at the White House were issued by the Office of the President and the First Lady to a number of people from Northern Ireland. The Northern Ireland Bureau in Washington acted as the link between the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister and the Office of Protocol at the White House. The White House issued invitations through the Bureau to the following Executive Ministers, Assembly Members and officials, all of whom attended the event.

- First Minister;
- deputy First Minister;
- Minister for Employment and Learning;
- Minister for Social Development;
- Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment;
- The Speaker of the Assembly;
- Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service;
- Chief Executive, InvestNI;
- Director, NI Bureau, Washington, DC;
- Special Adviser, deputy First Minister; and
- Special Adviser, First Minister.

We are aware that other invitations were issued by the White House via the British Embassy in Washington to Northern Ireland Office Ministers and representatives of the Police Service of Northern Ireland. In addition, the White House issued a number of invitations to local people via the US Consulate General in Belfast.

The Bureau did not have any responsibility for co-ordinating those additional invitations and is therefore unable to provide accurate information on the wider Northern Ireland representation at the White House reception.

Gender Advisory Panel

Mr P Weir asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail (i) the membership; and (ii) the community background of the Gender Advisory Panel.

(AQW 5906/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: The Gender Advisory Panel advises and assists in the development and monitoring of cross-departmental gender equality action plans. The membership of the Panel comprises 25 external stakeholders. Members of the Gender Advisory Panel are

representatives of women's organisations, representatives of men's organisations, the ECNI, NIC/ICTU and CBI.

A number of the groups which have been invited to join the Panel are membership organisations. Members of the Panel will ensure that information is appropriately provided by them to other interested groups and stakeholders. This also enables the views of grassroots organisations to be heard in the opinions and voices at the table. There is no record of the community background of current members of the Gender Advisory Panel. All members participate on a representational basis rather than in a personal capacity.

Gender Advisory Reference Group

Mr P Weir asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) to detail (a) the membership; and (b) the community background of the Gender Advisory Reference Group; and (ii) to indicate which members are representatives of community-based womens' groups.

(AQW 5907/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: The Gender Advisory Reference Group is comprised of ten members from the Gender Advisory Panel who self nominated to assist with the interim review of funding. They represent a wide range of groups including women's membership organisations, the Equality Commission and the Women's National Commission.

The Gender Advisory Reference Group will advise the Steering Group about how the Interim Review should be undertaken. They will also support communication about the Interim Review, and provide information to other interested groups and stakeholders, in order to seek to secure a consistent approach. There is no record of the community background of members of the Gender Advisory Reference Group. All members are representative of wider, regional or membership organisations and participate in a representational rather than personal capacity.

Funding to the Voluntary and Community Sectors in Belfast

Ms C Ní Chuilín asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) to detail the funding allocated by their Department to the voluntary and community sector in the Belfast area in the 2009/10 financial year; and (ii) how much of the funding is used for (a) staff support; and (b) programmes.

(AQW 5910/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: In the 2009/10 financial year, the OFMDFM Community Relations Unit has provided the following funding:-

District Council Community Relations Programme		
Belfast City Council	£371,408	Programme
	£122,786	Salaries and Administration
Total	£494,194	

Summer Intervention programmes		
Upper Springfield Development Co. Ltd	£17,930.00	Programme
Greater Village Regeneration Trust	£5,000.00	Programme
Falls Youth Providers	£5,000.00	Programme
Upper Ardoyne Youth Centre	£5,000.00	Programme
Lower Castlereagh Community Group	£5,000.00	Programme
Total	£37,930	

Community Relations bodies and groups in Belfast		
North-West Belfast Parades Forum	£64,718.00	Staff costs
Belfast Reconciliation Network	£ 28,202	Staff costs
North Belfast Interface Network	£ 13,000	Programme
Hewlett Packard Digital Communities Programme	£24,000	Staff costs
Transition Training	£35,000	Programme
Total	£164,920	

OFMDFM also funds the Community Relations Council through grant in aid for it to disburse funding across Northern Ireland in accordance with its funding schemes guidelines. It is not yet possible to ascertain how much of this funding was for programmes in the Belfast Area for the 2009/10 financial year.

Community Relations Council	£1,216,000	Salaries and Admin
	£2,331,000	Programme
Total	£3,547,000	

North Belfast Community Action Unit. Funding has been channelled through the Community Empowerment Partnerships (CEPs). The CEPs are a confederation of stakeholder organisations operating in or on behalf of the various North Belfast communities. The programme has the overarching theme of good relations. Activities delivered include youth development, social inclusion programmes, leadership development and cross community projects.

CEP	Salaries	Overheads	Programmes	Total
Ardoyne / Marrowbone	76,529.01	26,309.25	9,664.00	112,502.26
Ballysillan	19,064.01	31,046.22	26,259.00	76,369.23
Cliftonville	57,488.52	44,998.27	28,542.50	131,029.29
Citizen Youth	47,245.68	18,806.75	29,974.10	96,026.53
DLI	164,411.98	37,717.00	40,725.00	242,853.98
Greencastle	12,972.89	46,161.87	29,240.00	88,374.76
Ligoniel	25,206.37	31,795.31	39,002.25	96,003.93
Loughview	NIL	79,316.00	116,764.00	196,080.00
North Belfast Independent Advice	118,207.98	61,766.76	18,369.36	198,344.10
New Lodge	43,253.47	64,075.37	51,533.45	158,862.29
Rathcoole	8,836.56	70,329.82	24,230.00	103,396.38
Upper Ardoyne	9,313.59	38,565.00	21,389.00	69,267.59
Upper North	19,033.58	23,043.00	23,534.00	65,610.58
Total	601,563.64	573,930.62	459,226.66	1,634,720.39

OFMDFM has provided funding of £400k to the Department of Education in the 2009/10 financial year, for a range of youth summer diversionary programmes across all the 5 Library Boards. Specific funding condition stated that £160k should be earmarked for Belfast with £40k of that total being targeted

at North Belfast. The majority of this funding would have been for programme activities but it is not possible to determine the exact split between programme and staff costs for these activities.

Cross-border Event to Commemorate the Irish Famine

Mr G Savage asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister if the Executive has received a request from the Minister of Education or the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to discuss preparations or funding for a cross-border event to commemorate the Famine in Ireland; and if this item will be added to a future Executive meeting agenda.

(AQW 5968/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: It is not our practice to disclose details of Executive business. The content of Executive papers and all aspects of Executive business are confidential.

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Impact on Farmers of the Rising Cost of Fuel

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the impact on farmers of the rising cost of fuel.

(AQW 5739/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms M Gildernew): At this time we are acutely aware of the impact that the rising cost of fuel is having at farm level. This impacts on farmers and the farming family as rising fuel costs will result in increased cost of production for their farming enterprises and day to day living expenses. Currently CAFRE is helping farmers to become more energy efficient through energy efficiency workshops.

Rural Poverty Strategy and Action Plan

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development when her Department will launch the Rural Poverty Strategy and Action Plan.

(AQW 5781/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Since 2008 DARD's rural Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Programme has brought forward schemes to address issues of poverty and social exclusion in rural areas throughout the north. Five priority areas were identified through the development of a framework, namely, rural fuel poverty, rural transport, rural childcare, rural community development and a rural challenge programme to allow rural communities to identify and address local issues relating to poverty and exclusion. Actions to address these priority areas have been rolled out by my Department over the past two years.

I will continue to advocate on behalf of rural areas in my role as Minister for Agriculture and Rural Development and as part of the Ministerial sub committee for poverty and social exclusion.

Budget to Tackle Rural Poverty

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how much of the £10m budget to tackle rural poverty was spent in (i) 2007 - 2008; (ii) 2008 - 2009; and (iii) 2009 - February 2010, broken down by project.

(AQW 5782/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The programme for Government included a DARD commitment to bring forward a package of actions to address rural poverty and social exclusion across the budget years 08/09-10/11. Throughout 2008 and into 2009 ongoing research and consultation was carried out to develop the Anti Poverty and Social Inclusion Framework (AP&SE) and a range of interventions to address the key rural poverty and inclusion priorities identified (Childcare; Fuel

Poverty; Transport and Access; Community Development and specific local and regional poverty and exclusion issues). As the various interventions across the 5 priority areas are at different stages of implementation and are being delivered in collaboration with a number of government departments, statutory agencies and community and voluntary sector bodies it is difficult to give precise figures in relation to in-year spend to date. Overall spend across the budget years to end March 2011 is projected to total £10.5m including spend levered in through working in partnership with DRD, DHSSPS and DSD. The table below sets out how much has been spent in 2008-09 and projected spend for 2009-10 (actual spend will be confirmed by May 2010):

Programme / Project	Spend 08/09	Projected Spend 2009-10
Rural Childcare Programme	-	£300,000
Rural Fuel Poverty – warm home scheme in conjunction with DSD (DARD allocation)	£380,000	
Rural Fuel Poverty – home insulation in conjunction with DSD/NIE (DARD allocation)	-	£250,000
Rural Challenge Programme – Local Project	-	£44,000
Rural Challenge Programme Regional Project – Maximising Access to Services Grants and Benefits in conjunction with DHSSPS (DARD allocation)	-	£66,000
Rural Support	£76,000	£85,000
Rural Community Development including funding of the Rural Community Network (RCN) and the Rural Support Networks (RSN's)	£315,000	£1,100,000
Rural Transport assisted travel – in conjunction with DRD	£50,000	£340,000

Child Nursery Places under the Rural Development Plan

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development where the 400 extra child nursery places provided under the Rural Development Plan will be allocated.

(AQW 5791/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: My Department has recently awarded approximately £1.3m in funding to 20 applicants who submitted successful pilot/demonstration project applications to the Rural Childcare Programme. The Rural Childcare Programme was developed to provide solutions that address the particular and distinct challenges faced by rural areas/communities in relation to the delivery of and access to rural childcare services. DARD are not responsible for childcare provision and it is intended that these pilot/demonstration projects will help form evidence that can be presented to the responsible departments and inform the future provision of childcare.

One of the successful applicants was NICMA (NI Childminding Association) which has a project objective to create 400 new childcare places in 15 areas throughout the rural north. The project target areas are as follows:

1. Newtownhamilton, Camlough, Kilbroney, Burren, Mayobridge, and Conallon
2. Rathfriland & outlying areas
3. Washingbay, Killymain, Altmore, Coalisland N & S
4. Belcoo, Garrison, Belleek and Boa

5. Lisnaskea & Newtownbutler
6. Drumquin & outlying areas
7. Claudy, Ballykelly, Greysteel & Maydown
8. Cushendall, Glenravel, Carnlough, Cushendun, Glenarriff, & Glenarm
9. Armoy, Ballycastle, Portballintrae, Bushmills, Ballintoy, Dervock
10. Kilrea, Dunloy, Garvagh, Rasharkin & surrounding areas
11. Rostrevor, Newcastle, Kilkeel & Annalong
12. Killinchy, Comber, Donaghadee, Ballygowan, Kircubbin and parts of the Ards Peninsula
13. Downpatrick, Ardglass, Killough
14. Ballinderry, Moira, Maghaberry, Stoneyford, Dundrod & Glenavy
15. Plumbridge, Sion Mills, Newtownstewart & Donemana

Bonuses Paid to Non-Civil Servants

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for a breakdown of any bonuses paid in the 2009/10 financial year to persons, other than civil servants, from within the Department's overall budget.

(AQW 5818/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The following table provides a breakdown of bonuses relating to staff in the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute and the Loughs agency banded by grade.

Grade	Amount of Bonus Awarded (£)	No. of Staff Awarded a Bonus within the Grade
Senior Scientific Officer	£500	1 Member of staff
Charge Hand/ Spec Grade C (Industrial)	£2,400	16 Members of staff
Semi Skilled Grade E (Industrial)	£150	1 Member of staff
Semi-Skilled Grade F (Industrial)	£300	2 Members of staff
Senior Supervisor - Grade A (Industrial)	£300	2 Members of staff
Supervisor - Grade B (Industrial)	£300	2 Members of staff
UnSkilled Grade I (Industrial)	£150	1 Member of staff
Chief Executive Officer	£1,933	1 Member of staff
Total	£6,033	

Fox Population

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what her Department is doing to control the fox population.

(AQW 5878/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: My Department is not taking any action on this matter as it is unaware of any concerns about fox numbers. In June 2007, when asked if I would consider re-introducing the "fox bounty" to control the rise in fox numbers and their impact on wildlife, I concluded that, in view of the lack of evidence of any more recent concerns, there was no overriding need to re-introduce any control measure. That position has not changed.

The question of re-introduction of the fox bounty scheme was also raised in 2000 when my predecessor considered that it could not be justified given various factors including the probable level of effectiveness of such a scheme, the level of payment needed to encourage participation and the cost of resources required to ensure proper monitoring of the operation.

A 1968 report by Dr James Fairley noted that there was no case where bounty schemes have successfully controlled fox numbers however a scheme had been introduced here in 1943 in circumstances which suggested that the culling of the fox population was necessary to reduce the levels of predation on farm stock. The measure proved to be ineffective in reducing fox numbers and bore out the conclusions in Dr Fairley's report.

I will of course re-consider the position should there in future be any compelling and widely held concerns about fox numbers.

Assistance for Fishing Boat Owners to Acquire Electronic Log-books

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if her Department can provide any assistance for fishing boat owners to acquire electronic log-books.
(AQW 5879/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: My Department has secured EU funding to provide assistance of up to 95% of the cost of purchasing electronic logbook software from approved suppliers.

Monitoring of the Fishing Industry

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the continued need for monitoring of the fishing industry, given that most within the industry now self-monitor.
(AQW 5915/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Member States are under obligation through EU Regulation for competent authorities to put in place systems to restrict commercial fishing activity and record quota uptake, days at sea, and fish sales and movements. In the north of Ireland this responsibility falls to DARD.

Off-shore Wind Turbines and Sea Turbines

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if she has had any discussions with the fishing industry or fishing organisations about the development of off-shore wind turbines and sea turbines.
(AQW 5916/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: I have not had any discussions with the fishing industry or fishing organisations about the development of offshore marine renewable energy. However my Department is aware of the industry's concerns about such developments and, through its membership of the DETI led inter departmental Project Steering Group, is ensuring that the industry is kept aware of, and is consulted about such proposals by DETI.

I understand that the Anglo-North Irish Fish Producers Organisation and the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations have responded to DETI's recent consultation on the draft Offshore Renewable Energy Strategic Action Plan 2009 - 2020 and that ANIFPO was represented at a consultation seminar on the subject. The draft Plan proposes to establish of an Offshore Renewable Energy Forum involving marine stakeholders and I would urge the fishing industry to become actively involved in this.

Fish in the Irish Sea

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the increase in the number of fish, particularly white fish, in the Irish Sea brought on by the recent cold winter.

(AQW 5924/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Both 2008 and 2009 winters have been colder than recent averages, in terms of temperatures in the Irish Sea. A modest increase in abundance of juvenile cod was detected in AFBI research surveys during 2009 however, extensive update surveys conducted in the past few weeks have not yet been analysed. The Fisheries Science Partnership (FSP) managed by CEFAS (Centre for Environment, Fisheries & Aquaculture Science) also conducts surveys in the Irish Sea on commercial trawlers. ICES will analyse the latest research and FSP survey data in May and its advice will be published on 26 June.

Work-related Stress in the DARD Direct Office

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many working days have been lost due to work-related stress by staff in the DARD Direct Office, Glenree House, Newry in each of the past five years; and to express this figure as a percentage of the total working days.

(AQW 5933/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: It is not possible to identify absences specifically due to work-related stress as information as to the cause of stress is not recorded separately. Prior to November 2008, such absences were included in the category 'Psychiatric / Psychological illnesses' and since November 2008, such absences are included in the category 'Anxiety / Stress / Depression / Other Psychiatric Illnesses'.

The DARD Direct Office in Glenree House was not established until 28 January 2008.

The figures below represent the absences attributed to 'Psychiatric/ Psychological illnesses' or 'Anxiety / Stress / Depression / Other Psychiatric Illnesses' during the periods in question.

	Days Lost	Available Working Days	% Working Days Lost
01/02/08 - 31/03/08	65.0	2,180.2	3.0
01/04/08 – 31/03/09	232.5	14,012.6	1.7
01/04/09 – 28/02/10	189.9	13,448.5	1.4

Cross-border Event to Commemorate the Irish Famine

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how much funding has been set aside by her Department, in the current or next financial year, for a cross-border event to commemorate the Irish Famine.

(AQW 5935/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Whilst no funds have currently been set aside by my Department for a cross-border event to commemorate the Irish Famine, I have been in correspondence with Minister Ó Cuiv about this issue and I am currently considering how best it might be taken forward.

Cross-border Event to Commemorate the Irish Famine

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail any contact her Department has had with the Government in the Republic of Ireland regarding plans for a cross-border event to commemorate the Irish Famine, including the nature, level and content of this contact; and if there are plans for further contact on this issue.

(AQW 5938/10)

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 Skibbereen, County Cork and to express an interest in how the famine might be appropriately marked on an all island basis. Minister Ó Cuiv responded with details of the National Famine Commemoration Committee who organise commemoration events for the Famine, advising that this Committee agreed that events would be rotated around the four provinces, with an event planned for Ulster in 2011. I am currently considering how best this issue might be taken forward.

Agriculture Support Payments

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what agriculture support payments, including those fully funded by the EU, those co-funded by the EU and any other body and those co-funded by the EU and her Department, were made to members of the Royal Family or their agents in respect of the Royal Estate in Northern Ireland in each of the last five years
(AQW 5947/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: My Department holds the details of farm businesses which have claimed and been paid EU grant or subsidy. The information which we hold against each farm business does not identify the members of the Royal Family or their agents in respect of the Royal Estate.

National Ploughing Championships in the Republic of Ireland

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (i) if she (a) requested; and (b) received permission from the Executive to spend £33,500 on the National Ploughing Championships in the Republic of Ireland; (ii) if she did not seek Executive permission to give the reasons; (iii) why she deemed it necessary to award the funding to the event; and (iv) to outline the benefits to the Northern Ireland agricultural industry from providing funding for this event.
(AQW 5992/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: This matter did not require referral to the Executive.

No funding was awarded to the event. The costs incurred relate solely to the staging and staffing of a DARD exhibition.

The primary focus of the DARD exhibition at the National Ploughing Championships is to facilitate a number of small, locally based, developing rural businesses to access trade opportunities in the south. These businesses had received support from DARD through the Rural Development Programme or engagement with DARD Development Services. This has led to additional sales and orders for these businesses and following the initial support from DARD, some are now exhibiting independently at the National Ploughing Championships.

Closket River in County Armagh

Mr J O'Dowd asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail any work carried out, or reports produced, by the Rivers Agency on the Closket River in County Armagh in the last 24 months.
(AQW 6030/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: I can confirm that in the last 24 months my officials in Rivers Agency have carried out no works on, or produced any reports relating to, the Closet River in Co. Armagh.

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

Boys' Brigade Grounds at Ganaway, Millisle

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure if he has received any enquiries from national Olympic federations for their archers to train at the Boys' Brigade Grounds at Ganaway, Millisle, prior to the 2012 Olympic Games.

(AQW 5710/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr N McCausland): Sport Northern Ireland, which is in the lead in securing pre Games training camps (PGTC) for Northern Ireland in the run up to the 2012 Games, has not received any enquiries to date with regard to the venue being used as a camp for archery.

The Ganaway Centre in Millisle is one of 26 venues in Northern Ireland included in the London2012 Pre Games Training Camp Guide for the Olympic Games. The Ganaway Centre is advertised in the Guide and the Northern Ireland PGTC brochure for cycling only.

2012 Olympic Games

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure if any Olympic teams will be coming to Northern Ireland to train prior to the 2012 Olympic Games.

(AQW 5711/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Northern Ireland is seeking to attract 10 countries or teams for pre Games training in the run up to 2012. Sport Northern Ireland leads a small cross organisational working group to take this forward with representatives from local government, Invest Northern Ireland, Northern Ireland Tourist Board, and Disability Sport Northern Ireland.

Twenty six sports facilities have registered in the London2012 Pre Games Training Camp (PGTC) Guide for the Olympic Games and eight sports facilities have registered in the PGTC guide for the Paralympic Games.

The group is working proactively with the London Organising Committee for the Olympic Games (LOCOG) and through the sports governing bodies to attract those countries or sports to Northern Ireland. Inclusion in the PGTC Guide does not guarantee that the venue will be selected by a National Olympic or Paralympic Committee (NOC/NPC). Inclusion in the guide is confirmation from London2012 that the facilities are suitable for Olympic and Paralympic sports training.

Staffing Levels at the Irish and Local Studies Library in Armagh

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure if there has been any reduction in staffing levels at the Irish and Local Studies Library in Armagh; and if there are any future plans for staff reductions.

(AQW 5768/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Three staff currently work in The Irish and Local Studies Library in Armagh. There have been no recent changes to this position.

One of these staff is due to retire shortly. In the short term, Libraries NI intends to provide additional library assistant 'hours' to ensure continuity of service as well as the Belfast based Heritage Services Manager spending time in the library to provide additional professional support.

In the longer term, Libraries NI will consider staffing levels at the Irish and Local Studies Library in Armagh, as part of an overall review of heritage services which will be undertaken shortly.

Implementation of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages with Regard to the Irish Language 2005-08

Mr B Leonard asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what action he is taking to deal with attacks on the Irish language following the Pobal report on the 'Implementation of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages with Regard to the Irish Language 2005-08' highlighting this issue.

(AQW 5918/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I have considered the Pobal report however I do not believe that the needs of the Irish language can be best met through an Irish Language Act as there is insufficient community consensus on this issue. The needs of the Irish language can be best met through the Regional or Minority Languages Strategy which will protect and enhance the development of the Irish language and enhance and develop the Ulster-Scots language, heritage and culture.

The Regional or Minority Languages Strategy will seek to promote Ulster Scots and Irish as part of our shared cultural heritage and will contribute to the Executive's goal of a shared and better future for all.

Irish Football Association

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what discussions he has had with the Irish Football Association regarding the registration, by the Republic of Ireland, of players from Northern Ireland who have benefited from training and expertise gained through Northern Ireland school-boys, under 18s and under 21s.

(AQW 5926/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I have had a number of discussions with the Irish Football Association (IFA) on matters relating to the development of football in Northern Ireland. These have included the issue of players from Northern Ireland registering to play for the Republic of Ireland. Registration policies for football players are ultimately determined by the world governing body of football, FIFA, and the IFA. The IFA has taken its case to the Court of Arbitration for Sport in Switzerland and it would not therefore be appropriate for me to comment further at this time. However, as I stated in my previous answer, successive devolved Sports Ministers have made clear to both FIFA and the IFA that they support the principle of sports governing bodies doing everything possible to encourage young talented players from Northern Ireland to go on to represent their country at international level. I also support that position.

Department of Education

Capital Spend on Projects in Mid-Ulster

Mrs M O'Neill asked the Minister of Education to detail her 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 5695/10)

Minister of Education (Ms C Ruane): Capital spend on the schools' estate in Mid-Ulster in 2007/08, 2008/09 and in 2009/10 to date was as follows:

	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10 to date
£000s	3,732	4,279	8,123

Tá 7 mórthionscadal caipitil faoi láthair i dtoghcheantar Uladh Láir cuimsithe i gclár ollchaipitil mo Roinne. Tá obair á déanamh ar cheann díobh seo faoi láthair, ag Magherafelt High School, atá le críochnú mall sa bhliain 2011. Tá na tionscadail go léir atá fágtha ag céimeanna éagsula den phróiseas pleanála.

There are currently 7 major capital projects in the Mid Ulster constituency included in my Department's major capital programme. Construction work is currently underway on one of these, Magherafelt High School, which is due to complete in late 2011. The remaining projects are all at various stages of the planning process.

You may be aware that in October 2009, I commissioned a review of all current projects still in planning. This 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.

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.

As the Department's capital budget has not yet been finalised, it is not possible at this stage to state how much will be spent on capital works in schools in the Mid Ulster constituency in 2010/11

Early Years Support Services

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Education if the District Child Care Co-ordinators have been dissatisfied with any of the Early Years Support services; and which services they deemed unsatisfactory.

(AQW 5784/10)

Minister of Education: Oibríonn Comhordaitheoirí de chuid na Comhpháirtíochta Ceantair um Chúram Leanaf i mBéal Feirste go gar le Foirne Luathbhlianta de chuid an Iontaobhais Shláinte agus Chúraim Shóisialaigh, a bhfuil freagracht orthu as clárú agus cigireacht na réimsí luathbhlianta. Níl na Comhordaitheoirí de chuid na Comhpháirtíochta Ceantair um Chúram Leanaf míshásta le ceann ar bith de na seirbhísí a sholáthraíonn Luathbhlianta, an Eagraíocht do Pháistí Óga.

The District Childcare Partnership Coordinators in Belfast work closely with the Health and Social Care Trust Early Years Teams, which have responsibility for the registration and inspection of early years settings. The District Child Care Partnership Coordinators are not dissatisfied with any of the services provided by Early Years, The Organisation for Young Children.

Removal of Logos from the Western and South Eastern Education and Library Board Buses

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education who made the decision to remove logos from the Western Education and Library Board and the South Eastern Education and Library Board buses; and to outline the reasons for this decision.

(AQW 5822/10)

Minister of Education: I have been advised that during 2009 there was a series of meetings between the ESA Implementation Team (ESAIT) and staff from Education and Library Boards to prepare for the Executive's agreed date for the implementation of ESA on 1st January 2010. Although it was agreed that rebranding could not begin until after 1st January 2010 a particular issue arose around school buses.

To allow for rebranding to start on 1st January and also to alleviate undue pressure on transport staff applying the new logo to all buses over the Christmas holiday period, it was decided by Chief Transport

Officers after a meeting with ESAIT staff to start the process of removing some existing logos as buses came in for maintenance, cleaning and refuelling.

Tugadh comhairle dom nár bhain Bord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an Oirdheiscirt lógónna de cheann ar bith dá chuid feithiclí agus, mar sin de, níl aon athchur ag teastáil. Go dtí go mbunófar ESA i mí Eanáir 2010, cinneadh é, i mí Dheireadh Fómhair 2009, gan lógónna a chur ar fheithiclí nuafhaighte tar éis an dáta seo. Bhain Bord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an Iarthair roinnt lógónna d'fheithiclí agus níor chuir sé lógónna ar fheithiclí nuafhaighte tar éis an dáta seo. Athchuirfear na lógónna ar bhusanna BOLI roimh lár-Aibreán agus is é an costas iomlán ar athchur ná £2,700, costais ghaolmhara an lucht oibre agus ceannach na lógónna nua san áireamh. Íocfaidh BOLI as an athchur.

I have been advised that the South Eastern Education & Library Board did not remove logos from any of its vehicles so none require replacement. Pending the establishment of ESA January 2010, it was decided, in October 2009, not to place logos on any newly acquired vehicles following this date. The Western Education & Library Board removed some logos from vehicles and did not place logos on any newly acquired vehicles following this date. The logos will be replaced on WELB buses by mid-April and the total cost of replacement is £2,700, inclusive of associated labour costs and purchase of new logos. The WELB will pay for the replacement.

Removal of Logos from the Western and South Eastern Education and Library Board Buses

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education whether the logos removed from the Western Education and Library Board and the South Eastern Education and Library Board buses will be replaced; and who will pay for the replacements.

(AQW 5823/10)

Minister of Education: I have been advised that during 2009 there was a series of meetings between the ESA Implementation Team (ESAIT) and staff from Education and Library Boards to prepare for the Executive's agreed date for the implementation of ESA on 1st January 2010. Although it was agreed that rebranding could not begin until after 1st January 2010 a particular issue arose around school buses.

To allow for rebranding to start on 1st January and also to alleviate undue pressure on transport staff applying the new logo to all buses over the Christmas holiday period, it was decided by Chief Transport Officers after a meeting with ESAIT staff to start the process of removing some existing logos as buses came in for maintenance, cleaning and refuelling.

Tugadh comhairle dom nár bhain Bord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an Oirdheiscirt lógónna de cheann ar bith dá chuid feithiclí agus, mar sin de, níl aon athchur ag teastáil. Go dtí go mbunófar ESA i mí Eanáir 2010, cinneadh é, i mí Dheireadh Fómhair 2009, gan lógónna a chur ar fheithiclí nuafhaighte tar éis an dáta seo. Bhain Bord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an Iarthair roinnt lógónna d'fheithiclí agus níor chuir sé lógónna ar fheithiclí nuafhaighte tar éis an dáta seo. Athchuirfear na lógónna ar bhusanna BOLI roimh lár-Aibreán agus is é an costas iomlán ar athchur ná £2,700, costais ghaolmhara an lucht oibre agus ceannach na lógónna nua san áireamh. Íocfaidh BOLI as an athchur.

I have been advised that the South Eastern Education & Library Board did not remove logos from any of its vehicles so none require replacement. Pending the establishment of ESA January 2010, it was decided, in October 2009, not to place logos on any newly acquired vehicles following this date. The Western Education & Library Board removed some logos from vehicles and did not place logos on any newly acquired vehicles following this date. The logos will be replaced on WELB buses by mid-April and the total cost of replacement is £2,700, inclusive of associated labour costs and purchase of new logos. The WELB will pay for the replacement.

Teachers' "Sick Days"

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Education to detail the average number of "sick days" taken by teachers in a permanent post, in each of the last five years, broken down by (i) controlled schools; (ii) maintained schools; (iii) secondary schools; and (iv) grammar schools.

(AQW 5829/10)

Minister of Education: Tá an t-eolas a iarradh mionsonraithe sa tábla thíos.

The information requested is detailed in the table below.

CONTROLLED SCHOOLS

Financial Year	2004/05		
School Type	No of Days	No of Teachers	Average
Primary	25516	4155	6.14
Nursery	808	133	6.08
Secondary	20081	2753	7.29
Special	7697	792	9.72
Grammar	5847	1012	5.78
Peripatetic	1837	280	6.56
Total	61786	9125	6.77

Financial Year	2005/06		
School Type	No of Days	No of Teachers	Average
Primary	32133	4064	7.91
Nursery	989	132	7.49
Secondary	24768	2700	9.17
Special	8606	804	10.70
Grammar	7997	1016	7.87
Peripatetic	2128	242	8.79
Total	76621	8958	8.55

Financial Year	2006/07		
School Type	No of Days	No of Teachers	Average
Primary	29696	3971	7.48
Nursery	1596	129	12.37
Secondary	22448	2631	8.53
Special	9544	790	12.08
Grammar	6608	1017	6.50
Peripatetic	2156	237	9.10
Total	72048	8775	8.21

Financial Year	2007/08		
School Type	No of Days	No of Teachers	Average
Primary	30473	3971	7.67
Nursery	1098	130	8.45
Secondary	20277	2582	7.85
Special	9332	774	12.06
Grammar	5885	1014	5.80
Peripatetic	2399	238	10.08
Total	69464	8709	7.98

Financial Year	2008/09		
School Type	No of Days	No of Teachers	Average
Primary	28717	4002	7.18
Nursery	1486	137	10.85
Secondary	18635	2530	7.37
Special	7550.5	790	9.56
Grammar	6037	1040	5.80
Peripatetic	2029	243	8.35
Total	64454.5	8742	7.37

MAINTAINED SCHOOLS

Financial Year	2004/05		
School Type	No of Days	No of Teachers	Average
Primary	34707	3958	8.77
Nursery	890	64	13.91
Secondary	27463	3107	8.84
Special	804	74	10.86
Total	63864	7203	8.87

Financial Year	2005/06		
School Type	No of Days	No of Teachers	Average
Primary	42922	3859	11.12
Nursery	885	63	14.05
Secondary	33272	3101	10.73
Special	1057	74	14.28
Total	78136	7097	11.01

Financial Year	2006/07		
School Type	No of Days	No of Teachers	Average
Primary	40523	3777	10.73
Nursery	881	64	13.77
Secondary	30889	3036	10.17
Special	1092	67	16.30
Total	73385	6944	10.57

Financial Year	2007/08		
School Type	No of Days	No of Teachers	Average
Primary	36053	3761	9.59
Nursery	848	63	13.46
Secondary	26987	2956	9.13
Special	1009	67	15.06
Total	64897	6847	9.48

Financial Year	2008/09		
School Type	No of Days	No of Teachers	Average
Primary	33263	3801	8.75
Nursery	504	65	7.75
Secondary	24109	2928	8.23
Special	775	66	11.74
Total	58651	6860	8.55

SECONDARY/GRAMMAR

Financial Year	2004/05		
School Type	No of Days	No of Teachers	Average
Secondary	51577	6469	7.97
Grammar	5847	1012	5.78
Total	57424	7481	7.68

Financial Year	2005/06		
School Type	No of Days	No of Teachers	Average
Secondary	62672	6433	9.74
Grammar	7997	1016	7.87
Total	70669	7449	9.49

Financial Year	2006/07		
School Type	No of Days	No of Teachers	Average
Secondary	59358	6317	9.40
Grammar	6608	1017	6.50
Total	65966	7334	8.99

Financial Year	2007/08		
School Type	No of Days	No of Teachers	Average
Secondary	52222	6207	8.41
Grammar	5885	1014	5.80
Total	58107	7221	8.05

Financial Year	2008/09		
School Type	No of Days	No of Teachers	Average
Secondary	47315	6175	7.66
Grammar	6037	1040	5.80
Total	53352	7215	7.39

CCTV Cameras in Schools

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister of Education to list the schools which have CCTV cameras installed in bathrooms and shower rooms; and to detail the reasons given to her Department for the need to install the cameras.

(AQW 5842/10)

Minister of Education: The Primary School Building Handbook specifies that an external only CCTV system shall be provided for school security purposes. The CCTV system should be designed to monitor main entrance / exit points, main car parks and other areas deemed to be at a high risk level. CCTV can also be used to provide surveillance of areas not directly watched by staff, remote areas prone to vandalism or theft and for general premises protection during out of school hours.

The Department of Education makes no provision for the installation of internal CCTV cameras. Ultimately, it is the responsibility of individual school authorities and their professional consultants to decide on the installation / location of CCTV cameras in their school buildings.

Ní féidir líon na gceamaraí TCI atá suiteáilte i scoileanna agus cá háit a bhfuil siad suite a mhionsonrú. Bheadh sé am-íditheach le hé seo a dhéanamh agus bheadh na costais a thabhófaí díréireach i gceist leis an eolas a iarradh a fháil.

It is has not been possible to detail the number of CCTV cameras installed in schools or where exactly they are located. To do so would be a very time consuming exercise and the costs incurred would be disproportionate to the information requested.

CCTV Cameras in Schools

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister of Education what procedures are in place, within her Department, to scrutinise the installation of CCTV cameras in schools.

(AQW 5844/10)

Minister of Education: The Primary School Building Handbook specifies that an external only CCTV system shall be provided for school security purposes. The CCTV system should be designed to monitor main entrance / exit points, main car parks and other areas deemed to be at a high risk level. CCTV can also be used to provide surveillance of areas not directly watched by staff, remote areas prone to vandalism or theft and for general premises protection during out of school hours.

The Department of Education makes no provision for the installation of internal CCTV cameras. Ultimately, it is the responsibility of individual school authorities and their professional consultants to decide on the installation / location of CCTV cameras in their school buildings.

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It is has not been possible to detail the number of CCTV cameras installed in schools or where exactly they are located. To do so would be a very time consuming exercise and the costs incurred would be disproportionate to the information requested.

CCTV Cameras in Schools

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister of Education (i) to detail the number of CCTV cameras installed in schools, broken down by Education and Library Board area; and (ii) to list these schools.

(AQW 5848/10)

Minister of Education: The Primary School Building Handbook specifies that an external only CCTV system shall be provided for school security purposes. The CCTV system should be designed to monitor main entrance / exit points, main car parks and other areas deemed to be at a high risk level. CCTV can also be used to provide surveillance of areas not directly watched by staff, remote areas prone to vandalism or theft and for general premises protection during out of school hours.

The Department of Education makes no provision for the installation of internal CCTV cameras. Ultimately, it is the responsibility of individual school authorities and their professional consultants to decide on the installation / location of CCTV cameras in their school buildings.

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It is has not been possible to detail the number of CCTV cameras installed in schools or where exactly they are located. To do so would be a very time consuming exercise and the costs incurred would be disproportionate to the information requested.

Disposal of Computers in Education and Library Boards

Mr C McDevitt asked the Minister of Education, excluding the North Eastern Education and Library Board, who is contracted to manage the disposal of all computers used in each of the Education and Library Boards; and when the existing contracts expire.

(AQW 5864/10)

Minister of Education: Is mar seo a leanas atá an t-eolas a iarradh:

The information requested is as follows:

Education and Library Board	Computer Contract Management
Belfast	AMI Data Removal and Disposal undertake the work under DFP's Central Procurement Directorate's Disposal Framework contract which expires on 31 July 2010.

Education and Library Board	Computer Contract Management
South Eastern	AMI Data Removal and Disposal undertake the work under DFP's Central Procurement Directorate Disposal Framework contract which expires on 31 July 2010.
Southern	Disposal Services Agency undertake the work under DFP's Central Procurement Directorate Disposal Framework which expires on 31 July 2010.
Western	The Board had a contract with NWP Recycling which has now expired. The Board will be included within the new Central Procurement Directorate Disposal Framework contract which will be put in place from August.

C2K Contract

Mr C McDevitt asked the Minister of Education when the C2K contract is due for renewal.
(AQW 5865/10)

Minister of Education: Is stiúrthóireacht laistigh de Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an Iarthair é Classroom 2000 (C2K), rud a sholáthraíonn seirbhís bhainistithe ICT do scoileanna. Mar sin de, níl sé faoi réir conartha le haon eagraíocht eile.

Classroom 2000 (C2k), which provides all schools with a managed ICT service, is a directorate within the Western Education and Library Board. As such, it is not the subject of a contract with any other organisation.

Local Management of Schools Common Funding Formula

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 5457/10, to detail the reasons for the disparity in year-on-year funding from 2005 to 2010 between controlled, maintained and grant maintained integrated primary schools.
(AQW 5877/10)

Minister of Education: Is í Foirmle Comh-mhaoinithe (FCM) na Bainistíochta Áitiúla Scoileanna (BÁS) an mheicníocht a úsáidtear chun leithdháiltí buiséid tharmligthe scoile aonair a chinneadh. Is í is aidhm léi ná leithdháileadh cothromasach follasach an mhaoinithe atá ar fáil a bhaint amach trasna gach scoile, de réir a leibhéil choibhneasta riachtanais.

The Local Management of Schools (LMS) Common Funding Formula (CFF) is the mechanism used to determine individual school delegated budget allocations. Its aim is to achieve an equitable and transparent distribution of available funding across all schools based on their relative level of need.

The distribution of funding is primarily based on the number of pupils; their ages and profile; the relative size of schools; costs associated with school buildings; together with a range of other factors which recognise the distinctive features of individual schools and certain pupils that give rise to significant and unavoidable costs. Curriculum support for relatively small schools, Foundation Stage funding for years 1 and 2, support for Principals of smaller primary schools, above average teacher salary costs and the incidence of social disadvantage and educational under-achievement in individual schools are also taken into account.

All schools are funded on a consistent and equitable basis, regardless of their geographical location, management type or sector. Primary schools in the controlled sector are treated exactly the same as those with similar characteristics in the maintained sector.

The higher per pupil funding received by grant-maintained integrated primary schools reflects the additional responsibilities carried by these schools in respect of the payment of VAT costs, landlord maintenance expenditure and the administration costs associated with the running of their schools. Each of the five Education and Library Boards meet these additional spending commitments centrally for those controlled and maintained schools located within its area. Specific factors have been included within the CFF to assist grant-maintained integrated primary schools meet these costs.

Local Management of Schools Common Funding Formula

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 5457/10, and in light of the equality legislation and guidance issued by the Office of the First and deputy First Minister, for her assessment of the disparity between controlled, maintained and grant maintained integrated primary schools in relation to the average funding per pupil delegated under the Local Management of Schools Common Funding Formula.

(AQW 5882/10)

Minister of Education: Is í Foirmle Comh-mhaoinithe (FCM) na Bainistíochta Áitiúla Scoileanna (BÁS) an mheicníocht a úsáidtear chun leithdháiltí buiséid tharmhligthe scoile aonair a chinneadh. Is í is aidhm léi ná leithdháileadh cothromasach follasach an mhaoinithe atá ar fáil a bhaint amach trasna gach scoile, de réir a leibhéil choibhneasta riachtanais.

The Local Management of Schools (LMS) Common Funding Formula (CFF) is the mechanism used to determine individual school delegated budget allocations. Its aim is to achieve an equitable and transparent distribution of available funding across all schools based on their relative level of need.

The distribution of funding is primarily based on the number of pupils; their ages and profile; the relative size of schools; costs associated with school buildings; together with a range of other factors which recognise the distinctive features of individual schools and certain pupils that give rise to significant and unavoidable costs. Curriculum support for relatively small schools, Foundation Stage funding for years 1 and 2, support for Principals of smaller primary schools, above average teacher salary costs and the incidence of social disadvantage and educational under-achievement in individual schools are also taken into account.

All schools are funded on a consistent and equitable basis, regardless of their geographical location, management type or sector. Primary schools in the controlled sector are treated exactly the same as those with similar characteristics in the maintained sector.

The higher per pupil funding received by grant-maintained integrated primary schools reflects the additional responsibilities carried by these schools in respect of the payment of VAT costs, landlord maintenance expenditure and the administration costs associated with the running of their schools. Each of the five Education and Library Boards meet these additional spending commitments centrally for those controlled and maintained schools located within its area. Specific factors have been included within the CFF to assist grant-maintained integrated primary schools meet these costs.

Permanent Teaching Posts

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) how many full-time permanent teaching posts are currently available in each Education and Library Board area; (ii) how many qualified teachers, who have graduated in the last ten years, have not been able to obtain a full-time teaching post; and (iii) whether she will use these teachers to address the current under-achievement in literacy and numeracy in schools.

(AQW 5885/10)

Minister of Education: (i) Iarann an Roinn eolas ar fholúntais mhúinteoireachta ó gach scoil dheontaschúnta ar bhonn bliantúil. Soláthraíonn an t-eolas seo “alaghraf” d’fholúntais ar dháta ar leith gach bliain. Sainaithníonn an t-eolas is déantaí atá ar fáil folúntais ar an 2 Samhain 2009; tá miondealú de réir cheantar Boird Oideachais agus Leabharlainne leagtha amach thíos.

(i) The Department seeks information on teacher vacancies from all grant-aided schools on an annual basis. This information provides a “snapshot” of vacancies at a specific date each year. The latest information available identifies vacancies at 2 November 2009; a breakdown by Education and Library Board area is set out below:

FULL-TIME PERMANENT TEACHING POSTS UNFILLED AS AT 2 NOVEMBER 2009

Primary, nursery and prep	Classroom teachers	Vice-principals	Principals	Total
Belfast	4	1	1	6
Western	8	1	3	12
North Eastern	4	2	0	6
South Eastern	16	4	3	23
Southern	15	0	0	15
Total	47	8	7	62

Post-primary	Classroom teachers	Vice-principals	Principals	Total
Belfast	9	1	1	11
Western	7	0	0	7
North Eastern	4	0	1	5
South Eastern	3	0	0	3
Southern	7	1	1	9
Total	30	2	3	35

Special	Classroom teachers	Vice-principals	Principals	Total
Belfast	1	1	1	3
Western	0	0	0	0
North Eastern	3	0	0	3
South Eastern	3	1	0	4
Southern	0	0	0	0
Total	7	2	1	10

All schools	Classroom teachers	Vice-principals	Principals	Total
Belfast	14	3	3	20
Western	15	1	3	19
North Eastern	11	2	1	14
South Eastern	22	5	3	30
Southern	22	1	1	24

All schools	Classroom teachers	Vice-principals	Principals	Total
Total	84	12	11	107

- (ii) Information on the number of qualified teachers who have been unable to obtain a full-time teaching post is available in respect of graduates from 2003/04 onwards. This information, which has been sourced from the General Teaching Council here (GTC) and from the Department of Education (DE) teachers' payroll system, is set out below:

Year Graduated	Graduates per GTC*	Number without permanent job**
2003/04	698	94
2004/05	790	207
2005/06	816	291
2006/07	807	335
2007/08	805	427
2008/09	735	500

Neither DE nor the GTC hold information on graduates prior to 2003/04.

* The graduate figures for each year include a number of graduates who are not currently registered with the GTC.

** Permanent job refers to full-time permanent employment, part-time permanent employment, and those employed on contracts of one year or more.

- (iii) I will soon bring forward a revised literacy and numeracy strategy which will set out how we will tackle underachievement and promote the raising of literacy and numeracy standards. At the heart of the strategy will be the central role of the classroom teacher in providing high quality teaching for all pupils and appropriate support for those who are identified as underachieving. As with the school improvement policy, the strategy is based on the premise that schools are responsible for their own improvement and is being developed from the starting point of ensuring that the most effective use is made of existing resources.

Classroom Assistants: Ratio to Pupils

Mr T Lunn asked the Minister of Education what is the ratio of full-time classroom assistants to pupils in (i) primary schools; and (ii) secondary schools compared to (a) England; (b) Scotland; and (iii) Wales. **(AQW 5890/10)**

Minister of Education: Is é cóimheas cúntóirí ranga is daltaí i dtuaisceart na hÉireann ná 31.46 ag leibhéal bunscoile agus 51.38 ag leibhéal iarbhunscoile. Níorbh fhéidir, áfach, teacht ar chóimheasa inchomparáide do Shasana, d'Albain agus don Bhreatain Bheag.

The ratio of classroom assistants per pupil in the north of Ireland is 31.46 at primary level and 51.38 at post primary level. It has not however been possible to source comparable ratios for England, Scotland and Wales.

Classroom Assistants

Mr T Lunn asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of classroom assistants in (a) primary schools; and (b) secondary schools in each of the last five years. **(AQW 5892/10)**

Minister of Education: Mionsonraithe thíos atá líon na gcúntóirí ranga i mbunscoileanna agus i meánscoileanna i ngach ceann de na cúig bliana a chuaigh thart. Tá na figiúirí seo soláthraithe ag an Roinn agus ag Príomhfheidhmeannaigh na mBord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne.

The number of classroom assistants in primary and secondary schools in each of the last five years is outlined below. These figures have been provided by the Department and the Chief Executives of the Education and Library Boards.

	Primary	Post-Primary
2005/06	4091	2036
2006/07	4054	2217
2007/08	4219	2336
2008/09	4627	2589
2009/10	4924	2876

Classroom Assistants

Mr T Lunn asked the Minister of Education how much her Department has spent on (i) full-time; and (ii) part-time classroom assistants in each of the last five years.

(AQW 5894/10)

Minister of Education: Mar fhostóirí, tabhaíonn na Boird Oideachais agus Leabharlainne, na Scoileanna Deonacha Gramadaí agus Scoileanna Chomhtháite faoi Chothabháil Stáit an mhórchuid de na costais i dtaca le cúntóirí ranga.

The Education & Library Boards, Voluntary Grammar Schools and Grant Maintained Integrated Schools as employers incur the bulk of the costs in relation to classroom assistants.

My Department has however made available significant amounts of funding in respect of the additional pay costs, including arrears, arising from the job evaluation exercise.

The annual allocations over the past five years to the Boards are outlined below and confirm that to date some £37 million has been allocated to the classroom assistant job evaluations process. Unfortunately a breakdown of the allocations for full-time and part-time classroom assistants is not available.

CLASSROOM ASSISTANT JOB EVALUATION ALLOCATIONS (£000S)

Year	2009/10	2008/09	2007/08	2006/07	2005/06	2004/05	2003/04
Total Allocated	3807	3706	3609	3458	3300	3200	16000

Classroom Assistants

Mr T Lunn asked the Minister of Education what is the spend (i) per primary school pupil; and (ii) per secondary-school pupil for classroom assistants in Northern Ireland compared to (a) England; (b) Scotland; and (c) Wales.

(AQW 5897/10)

Minister of Education: The average expenditure per primary school pupil and post-primary school pupil on classroom assistants is as follows:

- Primary - £ 233
- Post-Primary - £ 174

Níl fáil ar an eolas inchomparáide a iarradh, áfach, i dtaca le caiteachas i Sasana, in Albain agus sa Bhreatain Bheag.

The comparative information requested relating to expenditure in England, Scotland and Wales is however unavailable.

Classroom Assistants: Ratio to Pupils

Mr T Lunn asked the Minister of Education to detail, where possible, the ratio of classroom assistants to pupils in Northern Ireland compared to (i) the Republic of Ireland; (ii) Finland; (iii) France; (iv) Germany; and (v) Austria in primary and secondary education.

(AQW 5899/10)

Minister of Education: The ratio of classroom assistants per pupil in the north of Ireland is 38.80.

D'fhoilsigh an Eagraíocht um Chomhar agus Fhorbairt Eacnamaíochta (ECFE) tuairisc le déanaí dar teideal, 'Oideachas d'Aonamharc – 2009' a chuimsigh táscaire ar líon na gcúntóirí ranga in aghaidh gach 1000 dalta. Ní raibh fáil ar shonraí le haghaidh an fhoilseacháin seo do na tíortha a d'iarr tú, áfach.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) recently published a report entitled, 'Education at a Glance – 2009' which included an indicator on the number of classroom assistants per 1000 pupils. Data on other parts of the world you have requested was however unavailable for this publication.

Capital Spend

Mr D Hilditch asked the Minister of Education what is the planned capital spend for schools in the East Antrim constituency for the 2010/11 financial year.

(AQW 5900/10)

Minister of Education: Seans gurb eol duit gur choimisiúnaigh mé athbhreithniú ar gach tionscadal reatha atá fós á phleanáil i mí Dheireadh Fómhair sa bhliain 2009. Cuideoidh an t-athbhreithniú seo le cur chuige níos straitéisí a fhorbairt ar chinntí infheistiú caipitil agus ar bhainistíocht eastát na scoileanna. Sa timpeallacht gheilleagrach reatha, cinnteoidh an t-athbhreithniú go n-úsáidfear gach acmhainn atá ar fáil chun na torthaí is fearr do pháistí agus an luach is fearr don cháinócóir a bhaint amach. Mar gheall air seo, tá sé tábhachtach go ndearbhaíonn muid go bhfuil gach tionscadal caipitil ina n-infheistiú muid inmharthana san fhadtéarma.

You may be aware that in October 2009, I commissioned a review of all current projects still in planning. This 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.

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.

As the Department's capital budget has not yet been finalised, it is not possible at this stage to state how much will be spent on capital works in schools in the East Antrim constituency in 2010/11.

Fund for Senior Managers' Severance Pay

Mr C McDevitt asked the Minister of Education if the £7 million ring fenced fund for senior managers severance pay is being used for this purpose; or whether the money is being reallocated within the Northern Ireland budget or to the Treasury.

(AQW 5923/10)

Minister of Education: Ní úsáidfear an mhórchuid den bhuiséad de £7 milliún, rud a bunaíodh chun pá téarfa a thairiscint do gach foireann laistigh de na heagraíochtaí sin a dtéann bunú an ESA i bhfeidhm orthu, sa bhliain 2009/10. Bhí moilleanna ar an reachtaíocht a thabhairt isteach agus, de bharr sin, an ceanglas ar phlean coinbhéirseachta agus cuíchóiriú a fhorbairt, agus éifeachtaí a chur i bhfeidhm ina gcúiseanna le neamhábaltacht na Roinne chun an buiséad seo a úsáid sa bhliain reatha. Mar gheall air seo, tuairisceofar go raibh sé seo gannchaite.

The majority of the £7 million budget, established to offer severance to all staff within those organisations affected by the establishment of ESA, will not be utilised in 2009/10. Delays in introducing legislation and the resulting requirement to develop a convergence plan, to progress rationalisation and effect efficiencies, has resulted in the Department being unable to use this budget in the current year. As a consequence this will be reported as underspend.

Event to Commemorate the Irish Famine

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Education to detail the level, nature and plans for any further contact she has had with the Government of the Republic of Ireland in relation to plans for a cross-border event this year or next year to commemorate the Irish Famine.

(AQW 5936/10)

Minister of Education: To date I have not had any contact with the south of Ireland Government in relation to the National Famine Commemorative Day event which is due to be held in the north of Ireland in 2011. I have discussed the development of this proposed event with my Ministerial colleague, Michelle Gildernew.

Is ócáid bhliantúil é Lá Náisiúnta Cuimhneacháin an Ghorta Mhóir agus óstálann cúige éagsúil é gach bliain. Creidim gur féidir linn, mar Choiste Feidmiúcháin, páirt thábhachtach a ghlacadh inti nuair a thagann an ócáid chuimneacháin go Cúige Uladh sa bhliain 2011.

The National Famine Commemoration Day is an annual event and is hosted each year by a different province. I believe that, as an Executive, we can and should play an important part when the commemoration event comes to Ulster in 2011.

Cross-border Event to Commemorate the Irish Famine

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Education how much funding has been set aside by her Department for a cross-border event this year or next year to commemorate the Irish Famine.

(AQW 5937/10)

Minister of Education: Níor chuir mé aon mhaoiniú ar leataobh do leithéid d'ócáid agus níor iarradh orm é seo a dhéanamh. Is ócáid bhliantúil é Lá Náisiúnta Cuimhneacháin an Ghorta Mhóir agus óstálann cúige éagsúil é gach bliain. Creidim gur féidir linn, mar Choiste Feidmiúcháin, páirt thábhachtach a ghlacadh inti nuair a thagann an ócáid chuimneacháin go Cúige Uladh sa bhliain 2011.

I have not set aside any funding for such an event and nor have I been asked to do so. The National Famine Commemoration Day is an annual event and is hosted each year by a different province. I believe that, as an Executive, we can and should play an important part when the commemoration event comes to Ulster in 2011.

After School Homework Clubs

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Education to list the schools in the Fermanagh and South Tyrone constituency which offer after school homework clubs; and of these how many have a teacher present.
(AQW 5950/10)

Minister of Education: Information on after schools clubs is not routinely collected. However, the Department's Extended Schools (ES) programme provides a recognised funding stream for those schools serving the most deprived and disadvantaged areas to provide for a wide range of services and activities outside of the traditional school day and this can include homework clubs.

Sa bhliain airgeadais 2009/10, leithdháileadh maoiniú Scoileanna Sínithe do 20 scoil i ndáilcheantar Fhearmanach agus Thír Eoghain Theas. Dhearbhaigh Príomhfheidhmeannaigh ar BOLI agus ar BOLD go dtairgeann naoi scoil imeachtaí thacaíocht foghlama i ndiaidh am scoile/ clubanna obair baile atá tacaíthe ag maoiniú Scoileanna Sínithe, eolas atá mionsonraithe sa tábla ceangailte.

In the 2009/10 financial year, Extended Schools funding was allocated to 20 schools in the Fermanagh and South Tyrone constituency. The Chief Executives of the WELB and SELB have confirmed that nine schools offer after school learning support activities/homework clubs supported by Extended Schools funding, and detailed in the attached table.

EXTENDED SCHOOLS 2009/10

- St Mary's Primary School, Newtownbutler
- St Paul's Primary School, Irvinestown
- St Davog's Primary School, Belleek
- Bunscoil An Traonaigh, Lisnaskea
- St Mary's College, Irvinestown
- St Eugene's College, Roslea
- St Comhghall's High School, Lisnaskea
- Fivemiletown Primary School
- St Patrick's Primary School, Dungannon

Funding to the Voluntary and Community Sector in Belfast

Ms C Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Education (i) to detail the funding allocated by her Department to the voluntary and community sector in the Belfast area in the 2009/10 financial year; and (ii) how much of the funding was for (a) staff support; and (b) programmes.
(AQW 5962/10)

Minister of Education: Féadaim a dhearbhuí gur dáileadh méid iomlán de £1,750,899 sa bhliain airgeadais 2009/10 don earnáil dheonach agus d'earnáil an phobail i gceantar Bhéal Feirste, agus figiúr a miondealaíodh mar a leanas:

I can confirm that in the 2009/10 financial year a total of £1,750,899 was allocated to the voluntary and community sector in the Belfast area, broken down as follows:

Organisation	Funding Allocated		Total
	Staff Support	Programmes	
Arts Council (Cultural Traditions Programme)		200,000	200,000
Belfast YMCA	46,203	1,108	47,311
Bytes Project	275,121	32,876	307,997

Organisation	Funding Allocated		Total
	Staff Support	Programmes	
Co-Operation Ireland	30,159	14,289	44,448
Corrymeela	48,989	4,620	53,609
Childrens Project (CPNI)	36,052	13,860	49,912
Community Relations in Schools (CRIS)	121,196	17,095	138,291
Early Years (NIPPA)	60,751	4,714	65,465
Forthspring	20,844	2,811	23,655
Childrens Enterprise (NICE)	17,898		17,898
Council for Integrated Education (NICIE)	31,534	1,848	33,382
NICHS (a Community Relations Organisation)	41,181		41,181
National Union of Students and the Union of Students in Ireland (NUS-USI)	24,024	3,326	27,350
Panarts	31,768	2,311	34,079
Prince's Trust	114,007	60,993	175,000
Public Achievement	32,756		32,756
Spirit of Enniskillen	119,565		119,565
Volunteer Development Agency Belfast	264,645	74,355	339,000
Total	1,316,693	434,206	1,750,899

It should be noted that the above figures relate to voluntary and community organisations based in Belfast, however, some operate programmes across the north of Ireland.

School Funding: Definition of Terms

Lord Browne asked the Minister of Education to detail her Department's definition of the following terms when used in relation to school funding (i) delegated funding; (ii) non-delegated funding; and (iii) recurrent funding.

(AQW 5965/10)

Minister of Education: Leagann an Fhoirmle Chomh-mhaoinithe um Bainistíocht Áitiúil Scoileanna (BÁS) an t-eolas amach ar rangú an caiteachais do scoileanna in Iarscríbhinní A1 go A3 den Scéim Chomh-mhaoinithe, rud atá ar fáil ag láithreán Gréasáin na Roinne:

The Local Management of Schools (LMS) Common Funding Scheme sets out information on the classification of expenditure for schools in Annexes A1 to A3 of the Common Funding Scheme, available on the Department's website:

http://www.deni.gov.uk/schools/schools_funding/common_funding/common_funding_scheme.htm;

- (i) Delegated funding includes funding which is allocated directly to all grant-aided schools under the Common Funding Formula (CFF) arrangements. Schools have full discretion for the use of such funds in accordance with their school's needs and relative priorities.

In addition to the funding provided to schools under the CFF, certain funds may also be allocated directly to schools during the financial year by the relevant Funding Authority. Schools also directly receive a range of programme specific funding (for example, extended schools, specialist schools, etc.), which are in addition to their CFF funding.

- (ii) Non-delegated funding for schools refers to a range of funding provided for school services, at an individual school level – as detailed at part 4 of the Common Funding Scheme. Such funding will include, for example, reorganisation allowances, substitution costs for long-term teacher sickness, in-service training costs, etc.
- (iii) Recurrent (termed ‘current’) funding is defined by exception. Any expenditure which enhances or creates an asset of government and capital grants which support investment by other bodies is capital. Anything else is current. In terms of funding for schools’ services this would include delegated funding and non-delegated funding as outlined at (i) and (ii) above as well as resources held centrally by Education & Library Boards for services provided to schools. Such funding would include, for example, home to school transport, milk and meals etc.

Preparatory Schools

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Education how many pupils are currently enrolled in each preparatory school.

(AQW 5995/10)

Minister of Education: Tá an t-eolas a iarradh sa tábla thíos.

The information requested is contained in the table below.

ENROLMENTS IN PREPARATORY DEPARTMENTS OF GRAMMAR SCHOOLS, 2009/10

DENI No	School name	Total enrolment
1620018	Bloomfield Collegiate	40
1620020	Campbell College Junior School	205
1620022	Fullerton House Preparatory School	217
1620023	Downey House School	208
1620027	Inchmarlo	191
1620028	Ben Madigan Preparatory School	180
1620089	Strathearn School	147
1620264	Victoria College	135
3620012	Dalriada School	125
4610063	Regent House School	132
4610085	Down High School	134
4610097	Glenlola Collegiate	80
4620015	Connor House Preparatory School	133
4620044	Sullivan Upper School	185
4620050	Friend's School	153
4620051	Wallace High School	110
5620263	Royal School, Armagh	35
Total		2,410

Source: school census

Note:

- Figures include children in nursery, reception and year 1 – 7 classes

Review of Capital Projects

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Education when she intends to announce the list of schools which will be scheduled for newbuilds under the review of capital projects.

(AQW 5996/10)

Minister of Education: Tá an t-athbhreithniú caipitil ar siúl agus tá m'fheidhmeannaigh ag obair chun an próiseas a chríochnú, a ghaiste is féidir. Mar gheall ar thábhacht an táisc seo, áfach, tá sé ríthábhachtach go mbailítear fianaise láidir agus go dtugtar breithniú iomlán ar gach tionscadal, sula ndéanfar aon chinneadh. Tá mé ag súil le go mbeidh mé in ann fógra a dhéanamh sa ghar-thodhchaí.

The capital review is ongoing and my officials are working to complete the process, as quickly as possible. Given the importance of this task, however, it is essential that robust evidence is collated and that full consideration is given to each project, before a decision is taken. I expect to be in a position to make an announcement in the near future.

Newbuild for Devenish College, Enniskillen

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister of Education (i) to outline her Department's current position on the economic appraisal submitted by the Western Education and Library Board on the provision of a newbuild for Devenish College, Enniskillen; and (ii) for a timescale of when her Department will complete the assessment of the appraisal and issue its findings.

(AQW 6008/10)

Minister of Education: An Economic Appraisal (EA) for controlled and voluntary post-primary provision in Fermanagh, including Devenish College, was submitted to the Department in January 2010.

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.

Chuide seo, choimisiúnaigh mé athbhreithniú caipitil a chuideoidh le cur chuige níos straitéisí a fhorbairt ar chinntí infheistithe caipitil agus ar bhainistíocht eastát na scoileanna. Sa timpeallacht gheilleagrach reatha, cinnteoidh an t-athbhreithniú go n-úsáidfear gach acmhainn atá ar fáil chun na torthaí is fearr do pháistí agus an luach is fearr don cháinócóir a bhaint amach. Tá an t-athbhreithniú ar siúl agus fógróidh mé an toradh agus na himpleachtaí le haghaidh infheistithe sa todhchaí nuair atá sé críochnaithe. Mar sin de, níl mé in ann clár ama táscach ar a dhul chun cinn a sholáthar ag an am seo.

To this end I have commissioned a capital review which 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. The review is ongoing and when it is complete I will announce the outcome and the implications for future investment. I am therefore unable to provide an indicative timetable for progression at this current time.

Inspections Carried out by the Education and Training Inspectorate

Mr P Butler asked the Minister of Education, to detail (i) the grades, from 1 to 6, obtained by each primary school from the inspections carried out by the Education and Training Inspectorate in each of the last four years; and (ii) the free school meal entitlement figures recorded at the time of inspection.

(AQW 6010/10)

Minister of Education: The Department does not use nor publish numerical grades for school inspections as, after extensive consultation with the sector, the Department decided against this.

Léiríonn an tábla seo a leanas ainmneacha agus uimhreacha tagartha na mbunscoileanna a ndearnadh cigireacht orthu sna ceithre bliana a chuaigh thart, chomh maith leis na figiúirí ar bhéilí saora scoile a taifeadadh ag an am a rinneadh gach cigireacht scoile.

The following table shows the names and reference numbers of those Primary schools which have been inspected over the last four years, along with the free school meal figures that were recorded at the time of each school's inspection.

You can view the inspection reports for these schools on the Education and Training Inspectorate's website at: www.denidata.nics.gov.uk/applInspRptsSearch/IRMain.aspx

Primary School Inspections - 2006/2007

Name of Primary School	School Ref No	Inspection	Free School Meal
Springfield Primary School, Belfast	1010221	23-Oct-06	41
Blythefield Primary School	1016207	22-Jan-07	99
St Oliver Plunkett Primary School, Belfast	1036602	09-Oct-06	241
St Clare's Primary School, Belfast	1036630	07-May-07	187
Bunscoil Bheann Mhadagain	1046596	30-Apr-07	45
Gaelscoil an Damba	1046654	23-Apr-07	19
Bloomfield Prep Department	1620018	23-Oct-06	0
Strathearn Prep School	1620089	26-Mar-07	0
Shanmullagh Primary School, Enniskillen	2011866	19-Feb-07	0
Derrygonnelly Primary School	2011899	30-Apr-07	*
Culmore Primary School	2012052	27-Mar-07	5
Bellarena Primary School	2012087	28-Feb-07	*
Newtownstewart Model Primary School	2016262	25-Oct-06	20
Gortin Primary School	2016395	12-Mar-07	*
Rosemount Primary School	2030364	12-Mar-07	78
St Mary's Primary School	2032294	24-Oct-06	10
magheralough Primary School	2032473	19-Feb-07	0
Drumnabey Primary School	2032600	23-Oct-06	14
Envagh Primary School	2032631	05-Mar-07	*
St Davog's Primary School	2032664	15-Jan-07	7
St Colmcille's Primary School	2036053	21-May-07	46
Steelstown Primary School	2036084	30-Jan-07	236
St Peter's and St Paul's Primary School, Dungiven	2036085	15-Jan-07	11
St Naile's Primary School	2036090	27-Nov-06	*

Name of Primary School	School Ref No	Inspection	Free School Meal
St Mary's Primary School	2036095	29-May-07	39
St Oliver Plunkett Primary School	2036143	15-Jan-07	78
St Dymphna's Primary School	2036186	21-Mar-07	16
Trench Road Primary School	2036259	09-Oct-06	119
All Saints Primary School, Omagh	2036557	27-Nov-06	9
Bunscoil an Traonaigh	2046669	14-May-07	9
Garryduff Primary School	3010594	26-Mar-07	*
Ballynure Primary School	3010802	21-May-07	*
The Diamond Primary School, Cullybackey	3010826	16-Oct-06	7
Ballymoney Model Primary School	3010866	12-Mar-07	64
Ballymena Primary School	3010875	09-Oct-06	43
Knockahollet Primary School	3010893	22-Jan-07	7
Mossley Primary School	3016015	21-May-07	75
Garvagh Primary School, Coleraine	3016119	09-Oct-06	23
Cairncastle Primary School	3016269	05-Mar-07	7
Glenann Primary School	3030708	21-May-07	8
Altayeskey Primary School	3032011	12-Mar-07	0
Ballyhackett Primary School	3032104	22-Jan-07	5
St Trea's Primary School	3032185	21-Mar-07	8
St Colum's Primary School	3032231	23-Oct-06	13
Lourdes Primary School	3036093	28-Feb-07	0
St Joseph's Dunloy	3036243	28-Nov-06	20
Desertmartin Primary School	3042162	08-May-07	8
Carnlough Controlled Primary School	3050519	08-May-07	10
Corran Integrated Primary School	3066561	28-Mar-07	20
Maine Integrated Primary School	3066652	29-May-07	6
Lisburn Central Primary School	4010807	16-Oct-06	63
Seymour Hill Primary School	4010882	23-Apr-07	49
Gilnahirk Primary School	4011606	14-May-07	28
Alexander Dickson Primary School	4013046	23-Oct-06	*
Harmony Hill Primary School	4013305	26-Mar-07	13
Spa Primary School	4016123	26-Feb-07	3
Kilmaine Primary School	4016192	29-May-07	23

Name of Primary School	School Ref No	Inspection	Free School Meal
Pond Park Primary School	4016401	23-Oct-06	18
Maghaberry Primary School	4016417	25-Oct-06	5
St Mary's Primary School, Aghliscnafin	4033002	12-Mar-07	19
St Comgall's Primary School	4036146	28-Mar-07	11
Ballydown Primary School	5011617	28-Feb-07	15
Aughnacloy Primary School	5012621	25-Oct-06	12
Poyntzpass Primary School	5016078	12-Mar-07	11
St Malachy's Primary School	5031133	22-Jan-07	42
St Mary's Primary School, Stewartstown	5032692	26-Mar-07	38
St Mary's Primary School, Ballygawley	5032735	19-Mar-07	11
St Mary's Primary School, Rathfriland	5033004	14-May-07	17
St Michael's Primary School, Finnis	5033006	19-Mar-07	6
St Joseph's Primary School, Dungannon	5036033	28-May-07	38
Jonesborough Primary School	5036122	23-Oct-06	17
St Malachy's Primary School, Carnagat	5036433	26-Mar-07	168
St Patrick's Primary School, Dungannon	5036504	30-Apr-07	137
St Francis Primary School, Lurgan	5036633	27-Nov-06	153
Windmill Integrated Primary School	5066554	23-Oct-06	49

PRIMARY SCHOOL INSPECTIONS - 2007/2008

Name of Primary School	School Ref No	Inspection	Free School Meal
Dundela Infants School	1016242	05-Nov-07	37
Bunscoil Mhic Reachtin	1016647	27-May-08	38
Our Lady of Lourdes Primary School, Belfast	1030313	08-Oct-07	28
St Joseph's Primary School, Belfast	1036246	08-Oct-07	*
Holy Trinity Primary School	1036623	28-Apr-08	122
St Malachy's Primary School, Belfast	1036466	12-May-08	298
Gaelscoil an Lonnain	1046672	03-Mar-08	22
Forge Integrated Primary School	1056535	10-Mar-08	38
Londonderry Model Primary School	2010380	12-Nov-07	98
Florencecourt Primary School	2011881	01-Oct-07	9

Name of Primary School	School Ref No	Inspection	Free School Meal
Ballinamallard Primary School	2011893	14-Jan-08	*
McClintock Primary School	2012344	22-Oct-07	*
Erganagh Primary School	2012617	03-Mar-08	18
Langfield Primary School, Drumquin	2012671	30-Apr-08	11
Lisbellaw Primary School	2016218	14-Jan-08	15
Sion Mills Primary School	2016442	26-Nov-07	71
St Tierney's Primary School, Roslea	2031868	23-Apr-08	20
St Paul's Primary School	2031898	05-Mar-08	48
Broadbridge Primary School, Eglinton	2032278	19-May-08	34
Loreto Convent Primary School	2032537	14-Apr-08	47
St Brigid's Primary School	2032573	05-Mar-08	13
St Macartan's Primary School	2032687	24-Oct-07	0
St Joseph's Primary School, Drumquin	2032700	07-Apr-08	17
Evish Primary School	2032702	28-Apr-08	8
Roscavey Primary School	2032723	19-May-08	*
St Canice Primary School	2036045	03-Mar-08	71
St Scire's Primary School, Trillick	2036153	01-Oct-07	*
St Mary's Primary School, Teemore	2036181	11-Mar-08	*
St Therese Primary School, Lenamore	2036461	12-Mar-08	227
St Patrick's Primary School	2036581	15-Oct-07	158
Harryville Primary School	3010781	08-Oct-07	59
Whitehouse Primary School	3010827	28-Jan-08	79
Carnmoney Primary School	3013301	08-Oct-07	25
Ballykeel Primary School	3013315	19-May-08	121
Leaney Primary School	3013325	26-Nov-07	81
The Irish Society's School	3016264	21-Apr-08	13
Hazelbank Primary School	3016444	04-Feb-08	5
Braid Primary School	3030836	28-Apr-08	0
St Columba's Primary School	3032268	12-May-08	5
St John's Primary School	3033709	30-Apr-08	34
St Joseph's Primary School	3036050	16-Apr-08	62
St James Primary School, Newtownabbey	3036100	14-Apr-08	23
St Brigid's Primary School	3036103	21-Jan-08	10

Name of Primary School	School Ref No	Inspection	Free School Meal
Carhill Controlled Integrated Primary School	3052071	14-Nov-07	14
Ballycarrickmaddy Primary School	4010720	22-Oct-07	8
Greyabbey Primary School	4011300	26-Nov-07	*
Newtownbreda Primary School	4011610	12-May-08	22
Dromara Primary School	4011619	04-Feb-08	11
Hollywood Primary School	4011631	12-May-08	26
Millisle Primary School	4011681	21-Jan-08	24
Brooklands Primary School	4016503	25-Feb-08	116
Ballymacrickett Primary School	4030823	12-May-08	14
St Joseph's Primary School	4030897	15-Apr-08	24
St Patrick's Primary School	4031628	13-Nov-07	12
St Aloysius Primary School	4033306	03-Mar-08	41
St Colman's Primary School	4033307	06-Feb-08	29
Bunscoil Bheanna Boirche	4046648	25-Feb-08	6
Edenderry Primary School, Craigavon	5011189	10-Mar-08	45
Iveagh Primary School, Newry	5011611	10-Mar-08	37
Benburb Primary School	5012451	12-Nov-07	*
Donaghmore Primary School, Dungannon	5012632	12-Mar-08	*
Newmills Primary School, Dungannon	5012719	18-Feb-08	*
Fivemiletown Primary School	5016088	04-Feb-08	12
Richmond Primary School	5016643	14-Jan-07	9
Cloughoge Primary School, Newry	5031130	03-Mar-08	53
St Joseph's Primary School, Madden	5031138	04-Feb-08	16
Holy Cross Primary School, Kilkeel	5031694	12-May-08	*
St Macartan's Primary School, Clogher	5032624	14-Apr-08	14
St Mary's Primary School, Dunamore	5032699	07-Apr-08	10
St Mary's Primary School, Glassdrumman	5036001	27-May-08	16
St Joseph's Primary School, Bessbrook	5036110	15-Oct-07	82
St Patrick's Primary School, Magherafelt	5036120	04-Feb-08	19
St Jarlath's Primary School, Dungannon	5036121	23-Apr-08	26

Name of Primary School	School Ref No	Inspection	Free School Meal
Sacred Heart Primary School	5036136	01-Oct-07	13
St Dallan's Primary School	5036136	01-Oct-07	13
St Joseph's Primary School, Caledon	5036463	12-Nov-07	*
Seagoe Primary School, Portadown	5046137	12-May-08	29

PRIMARY SCHOOL INSPECTIONS - 2008/2009

Name of Primary School	School Ref No	Inspection	Free School Meal
Elmgrove Primary School	1010255	11-May-09	168
Seaview Primary School	1010266	20-Apr-09	70
Beechfield Primary School, Belfast	1010271	20-Oct-08	46
Vere Foster Primary School, Belfast	1010321	30-Mar-09	39
St Aidans Primary School	1030316	11-May-09	117
St Bernadettes Primary School	1030317	20-Apr-09	123
St John the Baptist Girls' Primary School, Belfast	1036091	24-Nov-08	51
Sacred Heart Primary School, Belfast	1036471	13-Oct-08	97
Holy Child Primary School	1036576	11-May-09	120
Bunscoil An Tsleibh Dhuibh	1046593	06-Oct-08	59
St Patrick's, Mullanaskea	2031828	09-Mar-09	17
St Patrick's Primary School, Gortin	2032676	10-Nov-08	9
Altishane Primary	2032722	02-Mar-09	5
St Columba's, Derry	2036247	02-Feb-09	*
St Oliver Plunkett Primary School	2036291	30-Mar-09	16
St Mary's Primary School, Tempo	2036356	06-Oct-08	7
Bunscoil Cholmcille, Derry	2036574	19-Jan-09	63
Holy Trinity Primary, Enniskillen	2036632	26-Jan-09	117
Gaelscoil na gCrann, Omagh	2046677	02-Mar-09	7
Oakgrove Intergrated Primary School	2066558	31-Mar-09	96
Longstone Primary School	3010466	20-May-09	7
Dunseverick Primary School	3010726	26-May-09	8
Gracehill Primary School, Ballymena	3010794	18-May-09	9
Carrickfergus Central Primary School	3010841	26-Jan-09	32
Upper Ballyboley Primary School	3010850	30-Mar-09	*
Bushmills Primary School	3010873	26-May-09	30

Name of Primary School	School Ref No	Inspection	Free School Meal
Ballytober Primary School, Bushmills	3010892	24-Nov-08	10
Cullycapple Primary School	3012224	11-May-09	11
Damhead Primary School	3012225	12-Jan-09	12
Bellaghy Primary School	3012290	26-May-09	0
Maghera Primary School	3012291	06-Oct-08	*
Kilross Primary School	3013703	30-Mar-09	*
Gorran Primary School	3016055	06-Oct-08	6
St Mary's Primary School, Portglenone	3030621	02-Mar-09	16
St MacNissius' Primary School	3030848	29-Apr-09	0
St Anthony's Primary School	3030900	10-Nov-08	24
St Oliver Plunkett Primary School	3033303	09-Mar-09	32
Glengomley Integrated Primary School	3050791	27-Apr-09	20
Tonagh Primary School	4010885	29-Sep-08	46
Newtownards Model	4011345	26-Jan-09	95
Cairnshill Primary School, Belfast	4013024	23-Feb-09	16
Derriaghy Primary School	4013309	12-Jan-09	27
Abbey Primary School, Newtownards	4016399	23-Mar-09	71
St Joseph's Primary School	4031660	10-Nov-08	9
Lisnadill Primary School, Armagh	5011153	02-Feb-09	*
Dromore Central Primary School	5011575	13-May-09	45
Stewartstown Primary School	5012643	02-Feb-09	10
Clogher Regional Primary School	5012659	19-Jan-09	*
Dungannon Primary School	5012720	24-Nov-08	40
Millington Primary School, Craigavon	5016007	12-Jan-09	112
Drumgor Primary School & Nursery Unit	5016080	23-Mar-09	72
Donacloney Primary School & Nursery Unit	5016178	29-Apr-09	14
Donaghey Primary School	5016224	18-May-09	6
St Michael's Primary School	5031070	01-Apr-09	22
Clontifleece Primary School, Warrenpoint	5031301	12-Jan-09	*
Grange Primary School	5031589	29-Apr-09	19
St Malachy's Primary School	5032306	30-Mar-09	*
Crievagh Primary School	5032693	29-Apr-09	*

Name of Primary School	School Ref No	Inspection	Free School Meal
St Marys Primary School, Dechomet	5033011	11-May-09	7
St Mary's Primary School, Derrymore	5036006	29-Sep-08	6
Our Lady & St Mochua's Primary School, Derrynoose	5036639	24-Nov-08	11
St Bronagh's Primary School	5036673	02-Mar-09	31
Saints & Scholars IPrimary School	5066578	27-Apr-09	39

PRIMARY SCHOOL INSPECTIONS - 2009/2010

Name of Primary School	School Ref No	Inspection	Free School Meal
St Therese of Liseux	1036132	28-Sep-09	39
St Paul's Primary School, Belfast	1036624	05-Oct-09	107
Gaelscoil na Mona	1046671	30-Nov-09	46
Cliftonville IPrimary School	1056483	09-Nov-09	80
Ballougry, Derry	2012095	19-Oct-09	*
Eglinton	2012245	16-Nov-09	35
Gibson, Omagh	2016089	28-Sep-09	52
Bready Jubilee Primary School	2016645	18-Jan-10	11
St Mary's Newtownbutler	2031869	13-Oct-09	41
St Patrick's Primary School	2031874	11-Jan-10	24
St Joseph's Primary School	2032683	08-Feb-10	12
Gaelscoil Ui Dhochartaigh, Strabane	2046638	19-Oct-09	38
Woodburn Primary School	3010696	08-Feb-10	16
Doagh Primary School	3010754	12-Oct-09	8
Mallusk Primary School	3010812	04-Nov-09	7
Greenisland Primary School	3010817	20-Oct-09	11
Kilbride Primary School	3010828	11-Jan-10	*
Kells and COnnor Primary School	3010835	30-Nov-09	20
Straidhavern Primary School	3010879	01-Dec-09	*
Carnelridge Primary School	3012049	11-Jan-10	21
Tobermore Primary School	3012233	01-Feb-10	23
Ampertaine Primary School, Upperlands, Maghera	3012234	28-Sep-09	12
Ballycraig Primary School	3013331	01-Dec-09	39
Creggan Primary School	3030434	22-Feb-10	6
Carlane Primary School	3030713	28-Sep-09	*

Name of Primary School	School Ref No	Inspection	Free School Meal
Anahorish Primary School	3032257	20-Jan-10	12
Glenravel Primary School	3033311	08-Feb-10	6
St Bernards Primary School	3033313	01-Feb-10	43
St Columba's Primary School	3036147	28-Sep-09	16
St Ciaran's Primary School	3036268	09-Nov-09	*
St MacNissi's Primary School	3036575	05-Oct-09	31
Braidside Integrated Primary School	3066551	12-Oct-09	74
Castle Gardens, Newtownards	4011462	12-Oct-09	38
Killinchy	4016396	12-Oct-09	8
Riverdale Primary School	4016615	01-Feb-10	*
St Patrick's Downpatrick	4031644	09-Nov-09	65
St Joseph's Strangford	4033005	21-Oct-09	*
St Mary's Primary School	4036428	18-Jan-10	17
Mullavilly Primary School	5011095	05-Oct-09	6
Killylea Primary School	5011132	21-Oct-09	9
Newtownhamilton Primary School	5011137	30-Nov-09	6
Clare Primary School	5011142	11-Jan-10	6
Kilkeel Primary School	5011649	21-Oct-09	66
Walker Memorial Primary School	5012657	30-Nov-09	7
Bocombra Primary School	5016138	19-Oct-09	8
Windsor Hill Primary School	5016451	04-Nov-09	24
Anamar Primary School	5031146	04-Nov-09	18
St Mary's Primary School, Maghery	5031164	04-Nov-09	13
St James' Primary School, Marketthill	5031167	19-Oct-09	*
St Brigid's Primary School (Drumilly)	5031169	11-Jan-10	10
St Joseph's Primary School, Meigh	5031188	28-Sep-09	33
Moneydarragh Primary School	5031516	08-Feb-10	6
St Patrick's Primary School, Mayobridge	5031697	30-Nov-09	32
Ballylifford Primary School	5032208	28-Sep-09	6
Lissan Primary School	5032262	18-Jan-10	10
St Mary's Primary School, Lisbuoy	5032592	12-Oct-09	7
St Paul's Primary School, Cabra	5033003	19-Oct-09	5
St Patrick's Primary School, Cullyhanna	5036099	09-Nov-09	63

Name of Primary School	School Ref No	Inspection	Free School Meal
St Ronan's Primary School, Newry	5036409	18-Nov-09	26

Source: School Census

Note:

- Figures relate to pupils in nursery, reception and Year 1-7 classes.
 - For nursery class pupils, figures include those entitled to free school meals and those with a parent in receipt of a Job Seeker's Allowance or Income Support.
- * Relates to fewer than 5 cases.

Pupils from Low-income Families Studying A Levels

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Education how many pupils, aged 16 to 18 years old, from low income families are studying A Levels.

(AQW 6024/10)

Minister of Education: Ní choinnfhonn an Roinn an t-eolas ar leith a iarradh. Is é líon na ndaltaí idir 16 – 18 bliain d'aois atá i dteideal béilí saora scoile agus atá ag déanamh staidéir ar chúrsaí A-leibhéil nó ar chúrsaí coibhéiseacha in iarbhunscoileanna sa bhliain 2009/10 ná 2,887.

The specific information requested is not held by the Department. The number of 16 – 18 year old pupils entitled to free school meals, that are studying A-level or equivalent courses in post-primary schools in 2009/10 is 2,887.

These figures are taken from the annual School Census and relate to pupils aged 16 – 18 at 1 July 2009.

Local Management of Schools Common Funding Formula

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 5457/10, to detail the amount of funding provided, per pupil, under the Local Management of Schools Common Funding Formula, broken down by (i) controlled integrated primary schools; (ii) controlled Irish-medium primary schools; and (iii) grant-aided Irish-medium primary schools, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 6031/10)

Minister of Education: Leagann an tábla thíos amach an meánmhaoiniú in aghaidh an dalta a tarmligeadh faoi shocrúithe na Foirmle Comh-mhaoinithe um Bainistíocht Áitiúil Scoileanna i ngach ceann de na cúig bliana a chuaigh thart, do (i) bhunscoileanna comhtháite rialaithe; do (ii) bhunscoileanna rialaithe lán-Ghaeilge; agus do (iii) bhunscoileanna deontaschúnta lán-Ghaeilge.

The table below sets out the average per pupil funding delegated under the Local Management of Schools Common Funding Formula arrangements in each of the last five years, for (i) controlled integrated primary schools; (ii) controlled Irish-medium primary schools; and (iii) grant-aided Irish-medium primary schools.

	Controlled Integrated Primary	Controlled Irish-medium Primary (1)	Irish-medium Primary (2)
Financial Year	£	£	£
2005/06	2,313	3,129	2,604
2006/07	2,447	3,166	2,730
2007/08	2,533	3,253	2,847
2008/09	2,716	3,391	3,029

	Controlled Integrated Primary	Controlled Irish-medium Primary (1)	Irish-medium Primary (2)
Financial Year	£	£	£
2009/10	2,972	3,821	3,356

Notes:

- (1) Figures for one Controlled Irish-medium primary school
- (2) Figures for other maintained Irish-medium primary schools includes one Catholic maintained Irish-medium school and excludes one Controlled Irish-medium school.
- (3) The figures include allocations for nursery class pupils in primary schools where applicable.
- (4) 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.
- (5) Funding distributed in 2006/07 and 2007/08 excludes the funding allocated directly to primary schools in respect of the Children & Young People Fund.

Department for Employment and Learning

Measures to Prevent Convicted Sex Offenders Working in Universities and Colleges

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, pursuant to AQW 5071/10, whether any convicted sex offenders have been detected in each of the last three years by the Access NI vetting checks carried out on all new staff in universities and colleges; and whether any of the offenders had started work before their convictions came to light.

(AQW 5679/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning (Sir Reg Empey): All Further Education Colleges have confirmed that no convicted sex offenders have been detected in each of the last three years by Access NI vetting checks carried out on new staff.

Queen's University Belfast, Stranmillis University College and St. Mary's University College have confirmed that, in the last three years, none of their successful applicants, appointed to posts which require an Access NI enhanced disclosure, have been convicted sex offenders.

The University of Ulster has confirmed that an individual was appointed prior to receipt of the AccessNI Disclosure Certificate, however, it was made clear to the person concerned that confirmation of the appointment was subject to AccessNI clearance and, therefore, the individual was placed on restricted duties to limit access to children or vulnerable adults.

On receipt of the AccessNI Disclosure Certificate, which included details of a conviction for an offence of a sexual nature, the individual was suspended from duty and ultimately dismissed. The offence resulted in a Conditional Discharge and occurred over 18 years prior to the disclosure request.

Performing Arts Centre and Technology Innovation Centre of the South Eastern Regional College

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how much capital investment his Department earmarked for 2010/11 for the new Performing Arts Centre and Technology Innovation Centre of the South Eastern Regional College which was recently put on hold.

(AQW 5701/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: The procurement of the Bangor Performing Arts Centre and Technology Innovation Centre project has been put on hold, at tender stage, due to a reduction in my Department's 2010/11 capital budget. All of the 2010/11 capital funding available has been

previously committed to contractually committed schemes so no funding can be earmarked for this project at this stage.

Ashby Building at Queen's University

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline his Department's projected capital spend for 2010/11 for the refurbishment of the Ashby Building at Queen's University.
(AQW 5702/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: Subject to the outcome of the Executive's consideration of the 2010/11 budget proposals and their endorsement by the Assembly, my Department's planned spend on the schemes is as follows:

Institution	Project	Allocation
Queen's	Ashby Building Refurbishment	£2.45m
Stranmillis	Refurbishment of Science Teaching area	£0.5m
St Mary's	Phase 2 of refurbishment of Main Quad	£0.5m
University of Ulster	Sports Centre Construction, Coleraine	£2.45m

Science Teaching Area at Stranmillis University

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline his Department's projected capital spend for 2010/11 for the refurbishment of the science teaching area at Stranmillis University.
(AQW 5703/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: Subject to the outcome of the Executive's consideration of the 2010/11 budget proposals and their endorsement by the Assembly, my Department's planned spend on the schemes is as follows:

Institution	Project	Allocation
Queen's	Ashby Building Refurbishment	£2.45m
Stranmillis	Refurbishment of Science Teaching area	£0.5m
St Mary's	Phase 2 of refurbishment of Main Quad	£0.5m
University of Ulster	Sports Centre Construction, Coleraine	£2.45m

St Mary's University College

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline his Department's projected capital spend for 2010/11 for phase 2 of the refurbishment of the main quad at St Mary's University College.
(AQW 5704/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: Subject to the outcome of the Executive's consideration of the 2010/11 budget proposals and their endorsement by the Assembly, my Department's planned spend on the schemes is as follows:

Institution	Project	Allocation
Queen's	Ashby Building Refurbishment	£2.45m
Stranmillis	Refurbishment of Science Teaching area	£0.5m

Institution	Project	Allocation
St Mary's	Phase 2 of refurbishment of Main Quad	£0.5m
University of Ulster	Sports Centre Construction, Coleraine	£2.45m

Sports Centre at the University of Ulster, Coleraine

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline his Department's projected capital spend for 2010/11 for the construction of a sports centre at the University of Ulster, Coleraine. (AQW 5705/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: Subject to the outcome of the Executive's consideration of the 2010/11 budget proposals and their endorsement by the Assembly, my Department's planned spend on the schemes is as follows:

Institution	Project	Allocation
Queen's	Ashby Building Refurbishment	£2.45m
Stranmillis	Refurbishment of Science Teaching area	£0.5m
St Mary's	Phase 2 of refurbishment of Main Quad	£0.5m
University of Ulster	Sports Centre Construction, Coleraine	£2.45m

Economically Inactive People with a Disability

Mr M Storey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline the assistance available for people in the North Antrim constituency who are economically inactive and also have a disability. (AQW 5751/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: My Department provides a range of services and provision to assist those people within the North Antrim Constituency who are economically inactive and who also have a disability. These include a number of Disability Programmes such as Workable (NI); Access to Work (NI), Job Introduction Scheme, New Deal for Disabled People, as well as the Choices package available through the Pathways Programme such as Condition Management Programme, Work Preparation Programme and the Return to Work Credit. All of these programmes are designed to assist people to obtain and retain suitable employment and can be accessed through specially trained Pathways Advisers who are based in both the Ballymoney Jobs & Benefits office and the recently opened Ballymena Jobs & Benefits office.

My Department's Disablement Advisory Service provides ongoing specialist support and guidance to the Pathways Teams in both offices in the constituency through Disability Programme Managers, Access to Work Advisers and the Occupational Psychology Service. These staff can also offer specialist advice, guidance and assessment for people with disabilities or serious health conditions in the constituency who are looking to progress towards work, find a suitable job or remain in employment.

Economically Inactive People in North Antrim

Mr M Storey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what steps her Department has taken to address the number of economically inactive people in the North Antrim constituency. (AQW 5752/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: A comprehensive range of services is available through my Department's Jobs and Benefits offices and JobCentres and through contracted Providers to help economically inactive people find work.

Steps to Work is the Department's main adult return to work programme. The programme is available to anyone who is aged 18 years old or over and who is unemployed or economically inactive, irrespective of whether or not they are in receipt of benefit. There is no upper age limit for participating in the programme.

The Department has a range of provision within the Pathways to Work initiative called the choices menu. The Choices menu is targeted at people in receipt of Incapacity Benefit/Employment & Support Allowance. The choices menu consists of; the Condition Management Programme, the Work Preparation Programme, Return to Work Credit and New Deal for Disabled People.

The Department also provides a range of provision to assist disabled people who are economically inactive find and keep suitable employment, this provision includes: the Job Introduction Scheme, Access to Work (NI) and Workable (NI).

All of these services are available in the North Antrim constituency.

I should also say that progress is being made on the abolition of what have come to be known as "inactive" benefits. The Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) replaced Incapacity Benefit (IB) in October 2008 and I understand the Minister for Social Development, Margaret Ritchie MLA, will shortly introduce a new Welfare Reform Bill to the Assembly. This will further simplify the benefits system and provide for the final abolition of inactive benefits with the gradual phasing-out of Income Support.

Neutral Working Environment in Colleges and Universities

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how his Department ensures that colleges and universities maintain a neutral working environment.

(AQW 5772/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: Further Education Colleges and Universities must comply with all legislation relating to equality diversity and good relations, including Section 75 (2) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

My Department has taken a number of steps to help Further Education Colleges ensure that they provide a harmonious and welcoming working environment to all. This included the issue of guidance to Further Education Colleges to promote 'Good Relations', in line with their statutory requirements.

Similarly, it is a requirement of the Financial Memoranda between my Department and each University that they give due regard to all legislative requirements placed upon, to ensure fair and equal treatment for their staff and students.

St Patrick's Day Celebrations in Colleges and Universities

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what action his Department has taken to ensure that St Patrick's Day celebrations in colleges and universities are carried out in a community neutral way.

(AQW 5774/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: The University of Ulster, Stranmillis University College and St. Mary's University Colleges did not promote or celebrate St. Patrick's Day on their campuses. However, Queen's University and the University of Ulster organised and funded the Saint Patrick's Day Festival based around Queen's University's Students' Union on St. Patrick's Day. Only Belfast Metropolitan College chose to host an event related to St. Patrick's Day.

My Department was not directly involved with the St. Patrick's Day celebrations in colleges and universities. However, it is a requirement of the Financial Memoranda between my Department and each of the Northern Ireland universities and university colleges that they should have due regard for all legislative requirements placed upon them and their governing bodies to ensure fair and equal treatment of their staff and students.

As statutory bodies, Further Education Colleges must comply with Section 75 (2) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. This states that 'a public authority shall in carrying out its functions relating to Northern Ireland have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group'.

St Patrick's Day Celebrations: Belfast Metropolitan College

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what consultation the Belfast Metropolitan College had with his Department before arranging its celebrations for St Patrick's Day.

(AQW 5775/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: Whilst there is no requirement for Further Education (FE) Colleges to consult with my Department on the detail of their operational decisions, as public authorities, all Colleges are required to give due regard to the promotion of good relations.

Belfast Metropolitan College adopted a number of strategies to ensure the St Patrick's Day celebration was carried out in a community neutral way, including promoting the event within the broader context of a number of multi-cultural celebrations which take place during the course of the academic year, e.g. Chinese New Year, Polish Day and the Cultural Share Festival.

The College has played a key role in the implementation of my Department's cultural diversity policy throughout the FE Sector and has been commended for its initiatives in this regard. Belfast Metropolitan College's annual College Development Plan has also provided assurance of the College's continued commitment to the promotion of a harmonious working environment which respects and values all.

St. Patrick's Day 2010 Celebrations

Mr T Burns asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the total expenditure incurred by (i) his Department; and (ii) colleges and universities in relation to the St. Patrick's Day 2010 celebrations in the Holyland area of Belfast; and for a summary of how this money was spent.

(AQW 5810/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: The total expenditure incurred in relation to the St. Patrick's Day 2010 celebrations in the Holyland area of Belfast is as follows:

- (i) Although my Department is represented on Belfast City Council's Holyland Inter-Agency Group, it did not incur any costs in relation to the St. Patrick's Day celebrations.
- (ii) The University of Ulster, Stranmillis University College and St. Mary's University Colleges did not promote or celebrate St. Patrick's Day on their campuses. However, Queen's University and the University of Ulster organised and funded the Saint Patrick's Day Festival based around Queen's University's Students' Union on St. Patrick's Day. Only one Further Education (FE) College chose to host an event related to St. Patrick's Day.

The total expenditure incurred in relation to the St Patrick's Day celebrations by the Belfast Metropolitan College was £300, as staff from the College were involved in supporting and supervising activities in the Holylands area of South Belfast.

Queen's University and the University of Ulster organised a number of joint events, based around Queen's University's Students' Union, in the lead up to, and including, St. Patrick's Day. The universities have stated that the final expenditure to run the joint Universities St Patrick's Day Student Festival has yet to be determined.

I will, of course, write to you with this information when it becomes available.

Bonuses Paid to Non-Civil Servants

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for a breakdown of any bonuses paid in the 2009/10 financial year to persons, other than civil servants, from within the Department's overall budget.

(AQW 5825/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: My Department has not paid any bonuses from its overall budget to persons other than civil servants during the 2009/10 financial year.

Under the Reward and Recognition Scheme for staff below Senior Civil Service grade, only 19 staff within my Department were allocated awards in the 2009/10 year at a total cost of £7,150, equating to an average of £376 per person.

Policy of Appointing Sole Traders or Independent Contractors

Mr C McDevitt asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether the South Eastern Regional College carried out an Equality Impact Assessment on the policy of appointing sole traders or independent contractors.

(AQW 5931/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: The South Eastern Regional College has confirmed that contracting arrangements deployed to procure these services are in accordance with the conditions laid out in the Public Procurement Regulations and that it has complied fully with all guidance relating to equality screening. On this basis, the appointment of contractors by the College has not been subjected to an Equality Impact Assessment, as it was not deemed necessary to do so.

Admission Arrangements for Students

Mr M Storey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what are the current admission arrangements for students wishing to attend (i) St Mary's College; and (ii) Stranmillis College..

(AQW 5939/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: The current admissions arrangements are as follows:

- (i) Students wishing to apply to St. Mary's University College do so directly to the College and not through the Universities & Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS). St. Mary's operate a post-qualification selection system as opposed to the UCAS system, which makes the majority of its admissions decisions prior to the publication of final qualification results.
- (ii) All full-time undergraduate students wishing to apply to Stranmillis University College do so through the Universities & Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS). UCAS is the organisation through which applications to most full-time undergraduate degree programmes in the United Kingdom are processed.

There is no obligation for any Higher Education Institution to join the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS).

All Higher Education Institutions are expected to have an appropriate admissions policy which ensures that admissions are carried out on the basis of fair, transparent, reliable and objective criteria, applied equitably and consistently.

Stranmillis College

Mr M Storey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many people from (i) a Roman Catholic background; and (ii) a Protestant background were accepted in the first year intake for Stranmillis College for the (a) BEd course; and (b) PCGE course, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 5942/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: The number of people from (i) a Roman Catholic background and (ii) a Protestant background enrolled on the first year of (a) BEd course; and (b) PCGE course, at Stranmillis University College in each of the last five years, is detailed in the table below:

Year	Course	Protestant	Catholic
2004/05	BEd	175	15
	PGCE	25	10
2005/06	BEd	170	20
	PGCE	25	15
2006/07	BEd	125	15
	PGCE	15	5
2007/08	BEd	10	0
	PGCE	15	5
2008/09	BEd	115	5
	PGCE	5	0

Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)

Notes:

- (1) Figures have been rounded to the nearest 5.
- (2) The latest available data are for 2008/09.
- (3) Information on religion at Stranmillis University College is only collected for NI domiciled students.
- (4) Religious affiliation is not a mandatory question and therefore can have a high non-response rate.
- (5) In 2007/08 there was an extremely high non-response rate to the religious affiliation question for first year students enrolled at Stranmillis University College (76%). Figures should therefore be viewed in this context.

St Mary's College

Mr M Storey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many people from (i) a Roman Catholic background; and (ii) a Protestant background were accepted in the first year intake for St Mary's College for the (a) BEd course; and (b) PCGE course, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 5943/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: The number of people from (i) a Roman Catholic background and (ii) a Protestant background enrolled on the first year of (a) BEd course; and (b) PCGE course, at St Mary's University College in each of the last five years, is detailed in the table below:

Year	Course	Protestant	Catholic
2004/05	BEd	0	140
	PGCE	0	15
2005/06	BEd	0	170
	PGCE	0	15
2006/07	BEd	0	170
	PGCE	0	15

Year	Course	Protestant	Catholic
2007/08	BEd	0	115
	PGCE	0	10
2008/09	BEd	0	130
	PGCE	0	15

Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)

Notes:

- (1) Figures have been rounded to the nearest 5.
- (2) The latest available data are for 2008/09.
- (3) Information on religion at St.Mary's University College is only collected for NI domiciled students.
- (4) Religious affiliation is not a mandatory question and therefore can have a high non-response rate. The above figures should be viewed in this context.

Students from EU Countries and Non-EU Countries

Rev Dr R Coulter asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many students from (i) other EU countries; and (ii) non-EU countries are currently studying at universities in Northern Ireland.

(AQW 6029/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: In the 2008/09 academic year there were 445 students from (i) "other EU" countries (i.e excluding the United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland); and 1,550 from (ii) non-EU countries enrolled at Northern Ireland Higher Education institutions.

Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)

Notes:

- (1) Figures are rounded to the nearest 5.
- (2) The latest available data are for 2008/09.

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Proposed Incinerator at Glenavy

Mr M McLaughlin asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (i) whether Invest NI has made any indicative offers to Rose Energy for its proposed incinerator at Glenavy; and (ii) to list the dates and financial structure of these offers.

(AQW 5659/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mrs A Foster): Rose Energy was provided with an illustration as to the quantum/type of assistance that may be available, subject to a positive outcome of the due diligence process.

As a commercial proposition that is still under evaluation, it would be inappropriate to comment on the amount and structure of the proposed assistance as this was provided for indicative purposes only.

Britvic Northern Ireland

Mr B McElduff asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment if her Department has had any discussions with Britvic Northern Ireland in relation to the termination of its distribution contract for

C&C Products and how this will impact on the retention of jobs at Britvic's facilities at the Gortrush Industrial Estate, Omagh.

(AQW 5670/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: As C&C / Britvic is not an Invest NI client company my officials have not been involved in any discussions with Britvic NI, and have not been approached by Britvic NI to discuss the termination of the distribution contract for C&C products. I am, however, aware of the Company's importance within the local communities of Omagh and Belfast. This is a commercial decision but it is regrettable that job losses have resulted in this termination of contract.

Officials within DEL have, however, been involved with the Company at both Omagh and Belfast sites. Job Clinics, Benefit Awareness Sessions and Back to Work advice and guidance will commence at the company on 29th March 2010.

Developing Tourism Infrastructure

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how much the Northern Ireland Tourist Board has spent on developing tourism infrastructure since May 2007.

(AQW 5675/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The Northern Ireland Tourist Board has processed grant payments totalling some £25.4million under its Tourism Development Scheme over the period from May 2007 to March 2010. These payments have been made to a total of 38 capital development projects covering various aspects of tourism infrastructure development.

Foreign Direct Investment

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (i) how much foreign direct investment her Department has attracted; and (ii) how many jobs this has created, since May 2007.

(AQW 5677/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Between 1st May 2007 and 28th February 2009, Invest NI has attracted foreign direct investment commitments of £1.1 billion in relation to employment-related projects, offering £107million of financial support in the process.

Cumulatively the projects supported plan to create and safeguard 10,261 jobs, of which 7,533 will be new and 2,728 will be safeguarded. Initial indications show that 4,297 jobs are already in place (approximately 42% of the overall jobs total), of which 1,944 are new and 2,353 have been safeguarded.

It should be noted that the jobs promoted by Invest NI supported projects may take a number of years to create, and in the case of larger projects, may take up to 5 years to fully mature.

Examples of larger projects assisted during the period under review include investments by companies such as Bombardier Aerospace, New York Stock Exchange, The Global E-Mail Company, MM Teleperformance and Michelin Tyres.

In addition, Invest NI has also attracted foreign direct investment commitments of £236 million in relation to innovation-based projects, offering £70 million of financial support in the process. Although not directly related to job creation, these capability-development activities will boost business competitiveness leading eventually to export growth, productivity growth and employment opportunities.

Rising Cost of Fuel

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the impact of the rising cost of fuel on local businesses.

(AQW 5738/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: There is no doubt that fuel price increases are having an impact on our local businesses and on the cost of doing business generally. Those with large fleets of vehicles and those which require products or services to be delivered by third parties will be particularly susceptible to fluctuations in fuel costs.

Given the wider economic slowdown, companies are unlikely to be able to pass costs on to end users. However, to help offset such increases, Invest NI offers a range of energy programmes designed to help businesses increase profitability at the same time as becoming more energy efficient. For example, an Energy Efficiency Loan Scheme is available to help businesses reduce their energy costs. This provides interest free loans of between £5,000 and £400,000 that can be used towards the cost of relevant energy saving measures such as replacing or upgrading existing equipment with a more energy efficient version. The scheme also provides specialist technical advice and services and encourages best energy efficiency practice.

Rising Cost of Fuel

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what discussions have taken place between her Department and HM Treasury in relation to the rising cost of fuel.

(AQW 5763/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: I appreciate the fact that the cost of fuel has implications for businesses as well as for the general public. Fuel duty is, however, a reserved matter and is applied equally across the UK, with the same implications in every region. My Department has had no recent discussions with HM Treasury on this subject.

Land at Melmount Road, Strabane

Mr P Doherty asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 4569/10, to provide a timescale for Invest NI's completion of the acquisition and development of the 11.5 hectares of land at Melmount Road, Strabane, for the development of a Business Park, given that the Minister of the Environment has indicated his intention to grant approval for the two planning applications associated with the proposal.

(AQW 5802/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Invest NI has recently received a Notice of Opinion from Planning Service on its two applications for the Melmount Road Site. Whilst the Notice stated that Department's Opinion was that approval should be granted, a number of conditions were attached.

Invest NI and its technical advisers are currently considering these conditions to ensure that they will allow the project to proceed.

Until these deliberations have concluded, it would be premature to provide a timescale for delivery of the project.

Invest NI continues to work closely with Strabane Council, Planning Service and its consultees to take this project forward.

Industrial Development Board

Ms M Anderson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, following the Auditor General's report of 23 March 2010 (i) who was the Chief Executive of the Industrial Development Board when the leases for the two buildings at Campsie were agreed; and (ii) who were the developers with whom the leases were agreed.

(AQW 5984/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:

- (i) The Chief Executive of the Industrial Development Board when the leases for the two buildings at Campsie were agreed was Tony Hopkins.

- (ii) The two developers with whom the leases were agreed were Campsie Real and McCormick Properties.

Department of the Environment

Planning Applications

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister of the Environment what guidance is given to officials in relation to the weight to be given to (i) letters of support; (ii) petitions of support; and (iii) lobbying by public representatives on behalf of developers seeking planning approval for major projects.

(AQW 5803/10)

Minister of the Environment (Mr E Poots): Advice to Planning Service staff states that in the course of determining any planning application they must carefully take account of all public representations including those from elected representatives whether in support or objection to a particular proposal.

The weight to be given to such representations is a matter for the decision maker based on the grounds for support or objection and the nature of each planning application being determined, however, only representations which raise relevant planning issues can be afforded any weight.

My Department recognises the role public representatives have in representing their constituents in planning matters and relevant planning issues will be considered in the same manner as representations from the public. In terms of the statutory obligation to consult the relevant District Council, Planning Service will also take account of the corporate view of the Council.

Planning Applications

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister of the Environment how many times a planning officer has signed off on a planning application with a note indicating that he or she does not agree with the planning approval decision in each of the last three years.

(AQW 5804/10)

Minister of the Environment: The Planning Service's corporate opinion on a planning application is recorded in the case officer's professional planning report and is signed by three officers prior to the opinion being presented to Council. The corporate opinion may be reached by either the unanimous view of the three officers or by a majority. Where there is a dissenting opinion this is normally only recorded on the application file.

I am only aware of one case in the past three years where a planning officer, with a dissenting view, also recorded reservations when signing off the corporate decision reached by the Planning Service. In this instance, while the officer concerned had reservations about the Opinion to be presented to Council, he accepted the corporate decision of the development management group and continues to work on progressing the application to a final decision.

Whether there have been any other instances in the last three years could only be established by a manual check of over 90,000 application files where a decision has issued, which could not be done in the required timescale and would be disproportionate in terms of time and cost.

Planning Files

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister of the Environment what policies are in place to ensure that planning files are updated when new and relevant information comes to light which could influence a planning officer's opinion.

(AQW 5805/10)

Minister of the Environment: All relevant information submitted during the course of processing a planning application is placed on or attached to the planning application file in line with good file management procedures.

Certain new information, such as an amended scheme may result in the need to re-advertise, issue new neighbour notifications and reassess the entire proposal which could in certain instances lead to a change in opinion on a particular proposal.

Whistle-blowers in the Planning Service

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister of the Environment what policies are in place to protect whistle-blowers in the Planning Service.

(AQW 5806/10)

Minister of the Environment: In December 2008 the Department introduced a “Whistleblowing” Policy which also applies to its Agencies and core Departments. The policy was developed to meet best practice and comply with the Public Interest Disclosure (NI) Order 1998 which provides employment protection for staff who are concerned about malpractice within the workplace.

The purpose of this policy is to reassure staff that it is safe and acceptable to speak up. The policy informs staff if they have a concern, for example, malpractice or fraud, rather than wait for proof the Department would prefer for the individual to raise the matter as soon as possible. The policy sets out contact names and numbers of staff, who are at a senior management level both within DOE and Internal Audit, to report any concern particularly if the individual wants to contact someone not in their Line Management command.

If a member of staff reports a genuine concern under these arrangements, they will not be at risk of losing your job or suffering any form of retribution as a result. Provided they are acting in good faith, it does not matter if they are mistaken. This assurance does not extend to someone who maliciously raises a matter they know to be untrue.

If an individual who reports a concern asks the Department not to disclose their identity, this will not be done without the individuals consent or unless required by law.

Planning Applications

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister of the Environment what policies and practices are in place to ensure that claims by a developer relating to enhancements are capable of delivery in a planning application before planning opinion is offered.

(AQW 5807/10)

Minister of the Environment: In the consideration of planning applications my Department needs to be satisfied that sufficient information has been provided to allow all material aspects of a proposal to be taken into account before an opinion is formed. Such information may include supporting statements or letters from the applicant/agent and other relevant parties.

If an opinion to approve has been formed and agreed with Council, the Department may consider the imposition of conditions or the use of an Article 40 agreement to secure certain requirements. Conditions are enforced through the use of a Breach of Conditions Notice. An Article 40 Agreement is registered as a statutory charge on the land.

Electronic Planning Information for Citizens System

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister of the Environment to explain how the oversight of the Electronic Planning Information for Citizens system met the criteria for payment of efficiency bonuses.

(AQW 5813/10)

Minister of the Environment: Bonus payments to staff whose responsibilities included (but were not restricted solely to) the e Pic project were made in line with the criteria specified in the relevant pay

guidance for the years in question. For the Senior Civil Service (SCS) this guidance was revised each year in line with arrangements for SCS members elsewhere in the UK. For other staff the guidance contained in the NICS special bonus scheme was applied. The contribution of individuals to the e Pic project varied depending on what portion of their time was spent on this specific project alongside their other responsibilities.

Funding Originating from the Landfill Tax

Mr R Beggs asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (i) the projects which have benefited from funding originating from the landfill tax in each of the last five years; and (ii) the method used to allocate this funding.

(AQW 5831/10)

Minister of the Environment: (i) A total of £4,736,936.19 has been given to projects registered by Northern Ireland Environmental Bodies since 1 April 2005 as part of the Landfill Communities Fund (LCF), which is funded by the landfill tax and administered by a private sector regulator, ENTRUST, on behalf of Her Majesty Revenue and Customs. Additionally £2,059,036 was provided as grants between 2005-2009 by the Department as part of the Community Waste Innovation Fund (CWIF) to support sustainable waste management projects. Full details of the LCF and CWIF projects are at Annexes A and B, respectively.

(ii) Environmental Bodies (EBs) are organisations that have registered with ENTRUST in order to receive landfill tax money from landfill operators or other EBs. There are two methods of receiving funding through the LCF: directly from a landfill operator or, the most common way, is to approach a Distributive Environmental Body (DEB), who will distribute funds on behalf of the landfill operator. A landfill operator can contribute up to 6% of their landfill tax liability to EBs, and reclaim 90% of this contribution as a tax credit. They may bear the remaining 10% themselves, or else an independent third party can make up this 10% difference to the landfill operator.

ANNEX A

PROJECTS FUNDED BY THE LANDFILL TAX THROUGH THE LANDFILL COMMUNITIES FUND (LCF) ADMINISTERED BY ENTRUST

The following data has been supplied by ENTRUST. The data shows the projects registered from 1 April 2005 by Northern Ireland (NI) Environmental Bodies (EBs), which have received monies as of 31 March 2009. LCF expenditure for projects located in NI but potentially registered by non-NI EBs is not included in the data. The financial data is taken from the last financial year, which ended on 31 March 2009 and so spend that has occurred over the last 12 months (since 1 April 2009) will not be reflected in the figures. The tables below are based on financial years. The information is correct to the financial returns, which have been submitted to ENTRUST.

TABLE 1. PROJECTS APPROVED 1 APRIL 2005 TO 31 MARCH 2006

Environmental Bodies	Project Name	Environmental Bodies	Project Name
Arena Network, Northern Ireland	Washingbay Reedbed Project	Bryson House	Faith Waste
Bryson House	Bog Meadows Grazing Project	Bryson House	Duncans Park
Bryson House	Tree for All - Newtownabbey	Bryson House	Giant's Ring Public Field Path
Bryson House	Tree for All - Ards	Bryson House	Belfast Boundary Wildlife Hedge

Environmental Bodies	Project Name
Bryson House	Tree For All - Lisburn
Bryson House	Tree for All - Belfast
Bryson House	Tree for All - Carrickfergus
Bryson House	Reconnect to Nature
Bryson House	Waste Into Fashion Pilot Study
Bryson House	Design Into Fashion Pilot Study
Bryson House	Swap Shop Scoping Study
Bryson House	Wastebusters Video
Bryson House	Waste Minimisation Club - Pilot Programme
Bryson House	Biodiversity Improvements at Three Mile Water
Bryson House	Reedbed Reinstatement for Biodiversity
Bryson House	Belfast Schools Waste Minimisation Education Programme
Bryson House	Belfast Biodiversity in Bloom
Bryson House	Rams Island Heritage Project
Bryson House	Birds, Bees & Biodiversity
Bryson House	Outdoor Play for After Schools Club
Bryson House	Pilot for Re-use and Recycling of White Goods in Belfast

Environmental Bodies	Project Name
Bryson House	Six Mile Water Conservation Survey
Bryson House	Derriaghy River Glen
Bryson House	Jubilee Park, Kingsway
Bryson House	Union Locks, Blaris Road
Bryson House	Georges Lane Path, Seymour Hill
Bryson House	Dunmurry Station Footpath
Bryson House	Gelnavale Wildlife Reserve Phase II
Bryson House	Six Mile Water Community Woodland
Groundwork Northern Ireland	Mount Street Environmental Improvements
Groundwork Northern Ireland	Glas Na Baden Glen Entrance Scheme
Groundwork Northern Ireland	Rathcoole Multistory Environmental Improvements
Groundwork Northern Ireland	Ballycraig Wood and Way Marked Walkway
Groundwork Northern Ireland	Derryhill Community Garden
Groundwork Northern Ireland	St Endas GAC Sensory Garden
Groundwork Northern Ireland	Garden, Knockalla Park, Galliagh, Derry City
Groundwork Northern Ireland	Rosssdale/Rossmore Landscape Corridor Enhancement
Groundwork Northern Ireland	Environmental Improvements to the Caw Estate - Londonderry

Environmental Bodies	Project Name
Bryson House	Newtownbreda Breakout and Dream
Bryson House	Green Gym at Knockbracken
Bryson House	Slievenacloy Nature Reserve
Bryson House	Reward Scheme Feasibility Study and Pilot Programme
Derry Healthy Cities Project	Environmental Improvements Derry City Centre Open Spaces
Derry Healthy Cities Project	Sports Pavillion Culmore Playing Fields Derry City
Groundwork Northern Ireland	Monkstown Wood Improvement and Visitor Monitoring Project
Groundwork Northern Ireland	Trafalgar Wood, Three Mile Water Conservation Park
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	Bann Estuary Biodiversity Action Programme
Groundwork Northern Ireland	Glen Park Entrance Scheme
Groundwork Northern Ireland	Ballyeaston Village Enhancement Scheme
Groundwork Northern Ireland	Ballyduff Community Garden
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	Brown & Blue Bin Promotional Project
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	Do You Really Need A Plastic Bag? Campaign

Environmental Bodies	Project Name
Groundwork Northern Ireland	Multi-Use Games Area - Lettershandoney - Derry City
Pipe Organ Preservation Trust	Repair of Pipe Organ in Comber Non-subscribing Presbyterian Church, Co Down
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	Connor Environmental Improvements
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	Environmental Play by Konflux
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	Newry Basin LCA Biodiversity Action Programme
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	Hoys Meadow Park Improvement Scheme
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	Omagh Farmland LCA Biodiversity Action Programme
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	The Bag Lady Project
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	Mollycovet, Devenish Partnership Forum, Wildlife Guardian
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	Holy Cross Monastery, Wildlife Guardian
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	Arts-Space at Oxford Island
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	Refurbishment of Johnston Building, Armagh
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	Aghadowey Adventure Garden
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	Milford Cutting Nature Reserve

Environmental Bodies	Project Name
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	Environmental Calendar 2006
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	Can Do
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	Community Composting Pilot
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	The Bag Lady Project (Newry)
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	Armagh Enviro-Week 2006
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	Pomeroy Park Creation
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	Balshaws Quarry, Co Antrim
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	Ballydyan Nature Reserve, Co Down
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	Blessingbourne, Co Tyrone
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	John McSparran Hill Farm, Glendun, Co Antrim
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	Straidkilly Nature Reserve, Co Antrim
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	Ecos Nature Reserve, Co Antrim
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	Umbra Nature Reserve, Co Londonderry
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	Ballynahone Bog, Co Londonderry

Environmental Bodies	Project Name
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	Ulster Wildlife Centre, Crossgar
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	Inishargy Bog, Nature Reserve
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	Habitat Improvement at Keady Glen
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	Slievenacloy Nature Reserve, Co Antrim
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	Queen Elizabeth 11 P S Wildlife Garden
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	Woodland Creation and Maintenance at FSC Derrygonnelly
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	Lough Neagh Tree Sparrow Project
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	Bashfordsland Biodiversity and Access Project
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	Gracehill Old School Trust (GHOST)
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	Glasswater Wood - Crossgar
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	Pond and River Sampling Equipment
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	Blackhead Coastal Walk
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	Creation of Stephen Perry Sensory Garden at Mullicovet Mill, Co Fermanagh
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	Re-discover the Belted Beauty in NI

TABLE 2. PROJECTS APPROVED 1 APRIL 2006 TO 31 MARCH 2007

Environmental Bodies	Project Name
Arena Network, Northern Ireland	Craig's Bog
Arena Network, Northern Ireland	Seefin Walk, Ballyknock, Maghera

Environmental Bodies	Project Name
Bryson House	Bells Lane Lagan Towpath Maintenance Programme Year 2
Bryson House	Jubilee Park, Kingsway Year 2

Environmental Bodies	Project Name
Bryson House	Biodiversity NI @ Belfast Zoo
Bryson House	Bog Meadows Paving the Way Project
Bryson House	Enhancing habitat and understanding of breeding Arctic and Common Tern at Belfast Harbour Reserve
Bryson House	Enhancement of Lower Botanic Wildlife Corridor
Bryson House	Comber Greenway 2
Bryson House	Establishing a colony of breeding Common Tern at Portmore Lough Reserve
Bryson House	Comber Greenway 3
Bryson House	Comber Greenway 1
Bryson House	Tullyrusk Graveyard
Bryson House	Union Locks, Blaris Road
Bryson House	Duncans Park
Bryson House	Giant's Ring Public Field Path Year 2
Bryson House	Dunmurry Station Footpath Year 2
Bryson House	Millbrook Riverside Park

Environmental Bodies	Project Name
Bryson House	Derriaghy River Glen Year 2
Bryson House	Enhancing the nature conservation value of scrub and fen/ reed swamp at Portmore Lough Reserve
Bryson House	Bog Meadows Grazing Project Phase 2
Bryson House	Quercus Biodiversity Project - Falls Park
Bryson House	Quercus Biodiversity Project - Musgrave Park
Bryson House	Quercus Biodiversity Project - Victoria Park
Bryson House	Quercus Biodiversity Project - Ormeau Park
Bryson House	Quercus Biodiversity Project - Botanic Gardens
Bryson House	Quercus Biodiversity Project - Woodvale Park
Bryson House	Quercus Biodiversity Project - Alexandra Park
Bryson House	Belfast Hills Irish Hare (Slievenacloy) Project
Bryson House	Belfast Hills Marsh Upland Heath (Slievenacloy) Project
Bryson House	Clements Wood Access Project
Bryson House	Bashfordisland Habitat Creation and Access Project

Environmental Bodies	Project Name
Bryson House	George's Lane Path, Seymour Hill
Bryson House	Lowland Wood Pasture and Parkland in Belfast
Bryson House	Lough Neagh Wetlands Tree Sparrow Project
Bryson House	Lisbarnett and Lisbane Community Improvement Programme
Bryson House	Glenvale Wildlife Reserve Phase Three
Bryson House	Bog Meadows Nature Reserve Development Year 1
Bryson House	Securing the future of Breeding Waders at Belfast Harbour Reserve
Bryson House	Lagan Meadows Year 3
Bryson House	Beach Road Quarry and Nature Reserve CA2.1
Groundwork Northern Ireland	Inver River - Water for Wildlife and People
Groundwork Northern Ireland	Regeneration of Riverview Park - Derry
Groundwork Northern Ireland	Environmental Improvements to the Glen Play Park, Derry City

Environmental Bodies	Project Name
Bryson House	Environmental Improvements at Friends of Belvoir Community Woodland CR2.1
Bryson House	Environmental Improvements at Oakfield Glen CA2.2
Bryson House	Environmental Improvements at Woodland View Community Woodland A02.3
Bryson House	WWT Castle Espie Wetland Centre, Saline Lagoon A02.1
Bryson House	Environmental Improvements at Seymour Hill LO2.1
Bryson House	Environmental Improvements at Carnmoney Hill No. 2.2
Bryson House	Hanwood Trust Third Generation Pitch Tullycarnet CR2.2
Bryson House	Environmental Improvements at Monkstown Community Woodland No. 2.1
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	Bog Meadows Nature Reserve
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	The Field, Burrenbridge
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	Improving lakeside walk, Enniskillen
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	Lough Neagh Wetlands Whooper Swan Project

Environmental Bodies	Project Name
Groundwork Northern Ireland	Community Garden MacGill Court - Ballymagroarty - Derry
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	St Mary's PS Conservation Project
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	Topped Mountain Path
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	Cuilcagh Way
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	Orritor Conservation Project
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	Castlerock Community Association Garden
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	Ballinderry White-clawed Crayfish (<i>Austropotamobius pallipes</i>) breeding and reintroduction programme
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	Macosquin Land Reclamation
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	Downhill, Walled Garden
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	Biodiversity audit, implementation, planting of trees and 15 acres of wild bird seed and installing bird boxes at Loughgall Country Park
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	Lagan Meadows Nature Reserve

Environmental Bodies	Project Name
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	Water supply for Sensory Garden
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	Upgrading of Corngrade path, Enniskillen
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	Lough Acrussel Enhancement, Co. Fermanagh
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	Harmony Senses
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	Development of Delamont Country Park
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	Stewartstown PS Sensory Garden
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	Mayobridge Environmental Improvement Scheme
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	A Better Way Forward
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	Bio-diversity at Little Acorn Wood
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	Connecting The Community

TABLE 3. PROJECTS APPROVED 1 APRIL 2007 TO 31 MARCH 2008

Environmental Bodies	Project Name
Bryson House	Environmental Improvements at Kilcooley Community Woodland ND2.2

Environmental Bodies	Project Name
Bryson House	Making the Thompson Dock Gates Safe for the Future B0208

Environmental Bodies	Project Name
Bryson House	Environmental Improvements at Woodland Walkway B02.1
Bryson House	Community Gateway Comber Greenway B02.3
Bryson House	Union Locks, Blaris Road
Bryson House	Georges Lane Path, Seymour Hill
Bryson House	Tullyrusk Graveyard
Bryson House	Duncans Park
Bryson House	Bells Lane Lagan Towpath Maintenance Programme Year 2
Bryson House	Dunmurry Station Footpath Year 3
Bryson House	Derriaghy River Glen Year 2
Bryson House	Giant's Ring Public Field Path Year 3
Bryson House	Jubilee Park, Kingsway Year 3
Bryson House	Millbrook Riverside Park
Bryson House	Hollywood Old School ND2.1
Bryson House	Sigersons ST2.3

Environmental Bodies	Project Name
Bryson House	Making the Rosamund Preager Sculpture on the Thompson Pump House accessible
Bryson House	Enhanced Habitat @ Belfast Harbour B02.5
Bryson House	Bog Meadows Paving the Way Part 11
Bryson House	Bog Meadows LNR Pt 11
Bryson House	Slievenacloy Nature Reserve Phase 2
Bryson House	Lough Neagh Wetlands Whooper Swan Project
Bryson House	Lough Neagh Tern Breeding Platforms
Bryson House	Environmental Improvements at Seaview Community Woodland LA2.1
Bryson House	Glenside Community Woodland
Bryson House	Environmental Improvements at Carnmoney Hill Phase 2 no. 2.2
Bryson House	Neillsbrook Environmental Project Randalstown AN2.5
Bryson House	Riverside Park Improvement Scheme
Bryson House	Restoration of Lagan Navigation Lock 2 (Corby Wood)
Bryson House	Education Resource Centre Thompson Titanic Trail

Environmental Bodies	Project Name
Bryson House	Recreational / Environmental Facilities Drummond Centre ST2.6
Bryson House	Enhanced Reedbed @ Belfast Harbour B02.5
Bryson House	Regeneration of Ballytotten Pk St2.5
Bryson House	Environmental Improvements at Burn Walk Community Woodland ST2.1
Bryson House	Nature Study Picnic Area ST2.2
Pipe Organ Preservation Trust	Rebuild of the Organ in Holy Trinity Church Banbridge Co. Down
Pipe Organ Preservation Trust	Renovation of the organ in All Saints church Antrim co. Antrim
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	City Park Water Management and Enhancement Project
Pipe Organ Preservation Trust	Repairs to the organ in St Thomas' Church Douglas Isle of Man
Pipe Organ Preservation Trust	Repair of organ in Ahorey Presbyterian Church Co. Armagh
Pipe Organ Preservation Trust	Restoration of Organs in St Andrew's Church Deal Kent
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	Improving Drumcainre Forest Walk, Cookstown

Environmental Bodies	Project Name
Bryson House	Improvement Work on Donnemana River
Creggan Country Park Enterprises Limited	Creggan Country Park Access Project
Groundwork Northern Ireland	Enhancing Access to Claudy Play Area
Pipe Organ Preservation Trust	Rebuild of Pipe Organ in All Saints' Church Clooney, Londonderry
Pipe Organ Preservation Trust	Restoration of the Organ in St Brendan's Church Sydenham Belfast
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	Tree Survey at Folly Glen, Armagh
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	Silent Valley Nature Trail Phase 2
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	Landscaping of Mid Ulster Sports Arena
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	New Nature Reserve at Moyola, Waterfoot, Lough Neagh
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	Planting Native Trees in Clare Glen
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	Improvements to Forthill / Cemetery, Cookstown
Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	Planting Native Trees at Tandreege Leisure Centre

TABLE 4. PROJECTS APPROVED 1 APRIL 2008 TO 31 MARCH 2009

Environmental Bodies	Project Name	Environmental Bodies	Project Name
Bryson House	Restoration work on SS Nomadic	Groundwork Northern Ireland	Creation of a Multi-use games area at the Glen Play Park, Derry City
Bryson House	Lagan Watersports	Groundwork Northern Ireland	Lapwing Recovery at Belfast Harbour Reserve
Bryson House	Shaws Bridge Boathouse	Groundwork Northern Ireland	Regeneration of Roulston Avenue Playground
Bryson House	Clarence Wharf Project	Groundwork Northern Ireland	Glenavy Youth Project '07'
Groundwork Northern Ireland	Village Green Playground - Eglinton, Northern Ireland	Groundwork Northern Ireland	Lisburn Rangers Ground Development Project
Groundwork Northern Ireland	Seymour Hill Community Woodland Path Upgrade	Pipe Organ Preservation Trust	Restoration and rebuilding of organ in The Cathedral Church of Christ the Redeemer, Dromore Co. Down
Groundwork Northern Ireland	Safeguarding the Future for Lapwing in the Lough Neagh Basin	Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	Giant Hogweed Control on Drum Manor/ Drumard Tributary
Groundwork Northern Ireland	Glenbank Woodland Trail	Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	Drain and Reseed Portion of Mall, Armagh
Groundwork Northern Ireland	Crewe United Multi - Sports Pitch Development	Wildlife Trust (Ulster)	Environmental Improvement Work at Ballyronan Marina
Groundwork Northern Ireland	Regeneration of Maydown Playground		

ANNEX B**PROJECTS SUPPORTED BY THE COMMUNITY WASTE INNOVATION FUND (CWIF) ADMINISTERED BY ENVIRONMENT AND HERITAGE SERVICE (NOW THE NORTHERN IRELAND ENVIRONMENT AGENCY) OVER THE PERIOD 2005 TO 2009**

	Applicant's Name	Description	Total final agreed project costs	Agreed final grant applied for	% Grant
1	Derg Valley Care Ltd	Glass for life project which will recycle glass in labour intensive manner to create meaningful employment for 20 adults with learning disabilities.	£829,504	£202,753	24%
2	Bryson House 'Rathlin Project'	Joint application with Rathlin community to provide each dwelling with a container to store and carry materials to a newly created multi-material bring site on the island.	£10,317	£9,858	96%
3	Bryson House 'Sort It Out'	'Sort it out' waste minimisation programme. Educational programme for primary-school children to promote and create awareness of waste management.	£567,190	£425,392	75%
4	East Belfast Mission	This project is an advancement of an existing practice. The proposal is to develop a new outlet for the resale of second - hand furniture and electrical supplies.	£804,722	£450,000	56%
5	Conservation Volunteers Ni	To set up a green waste recycling project in Coleraine Borough. To provide a kerbside collection facility, a processing yard and associated equipment.	£431,000	£126,548	29%
6	Baglady Productions	The NEEDabag 2 project to encourage alternatives to plastic bags, promotes recycling, and reduces the number of non-biodegradable plastic bags to the environment.	£82,800	£58,480	71%
7	Envirocentre	The establishment of a Northern Ireland Sustainability and Resources Institute as part of the Queens University Centre for Sustainability and Environmental Governance.	£154,000	£154,000	100%

	Applicant's Name	Description	Total final agreed project costs	Agreed final grant applied for	% Grant
8	Sustainable Ni	To organise a major NI-wide conference in November 2005 on community waste issues and produce a Waste Guide highlighting best practice and offering practical help.	£31,500	£21,000	67%
9	Limavady Community Development Initiative	To provide a home collection service for glass, textiles, furniture, garden waste and paper. To employ a project co-ordinator and general operative to work in the Limavady area to make a significant contribution to the NI Local & Council Waste Management.	£361,368	£167,758	46%
10	Voluntary Service Lisburn Ltd (Vsl)	To provide a collection service for unwanted domestic white goods and a 'drop off' area for the public to bring unwanted items for reuse or recycling.	£443,247	£443,247	100%
Total			£3,715,648	£2,059,036	55%

The Belfast Wheel

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the status of the planning application for the 'Belfast Wheel'; and when a determination will be made.

(AQW 5920/10)

Minister of the Environment: Planning Service had requested information from the applicant to support the case for the application to retain the wheel in its current location on 5 October 2009 with a further request issuing on 4 March 2010. This information has not been provided. However, on 22 March the applicant informed Planning Service of his intention to close the wheel at 6 pm on 11 April 2010.

In view of this, and the lack of the requested information, Planning Service will now process the application to conclusion. I anticipate, therefore, that a recommendation in respect of the application will be made to the Town Planning Committee of Belfast City Council on 22 April 2010.

Craigmore Road Landfill Site

Mr B Leonard asked the Minister of the Environment (i) how many complaints his Department received in relation to the bad smell coming from the Craigmore Road landfill site in Ringsend during (a) October to December 2009; and (b) January to March 2010; (ii) what remedial actions were demanded; and (iii) what action his Department is taking to eradicate this problem.

(AQW 5921/10)

Minister of the Environment: (i) NIEA has received 2 complaints in relation to bad smells allegedly emanating from the Craigmore landfill site from October to December 2009 and a further 24 in 2010 to date.

(ii) An enforcement notice was issued by NIEA requesting odour source investigations and mitigation measures be installed at the site within a restricted timescale, the operator was also asked to

submit landfill gas management plans. The operator has subsequently installed gas management infrastructure and carried out extensive capping works on site, which has mitigated odour at the site.

(iii) NIEA continues to monitor the situation through regular site inspections.

Electric Cars

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment how he plans to introduce and promote the use of electric cars.

(AQW 5922/10)

Minister of the Environment: Although transport issues are in the main a matter for the Minister for Regional Development my environmental remit includes climate change policy.

Latest figures show that road transport is responsible for over 30% of the total CO₂ emissions in Northern Ireland and that transport emissions have risen by almost 50% since 1990. I am therefore keen to encourage alternative forms of travel which reduce emissions and I understand many companies are working to develop technologies that might efficiently exploit the potential of substitutes to fossil fuel for transport.

The Committee on Climate Change which provides independent advice to government, in its December 2008 Report, suggested that electric vehicles combined with the decarbonisation of electricity generation could lead to dramatic reductions in emissions from cars and light vans.

With levels of renewable electricity generation likely to increase significantly over the next 10 years I believe the time is right to explore further the role which electric vehicles can play in maximising the output from renewable sources, particularly wind, while providing a flexible transport solution with no harmful emissions.

However this work needs to be undertaken in a joined up manner. I have therefore agreed that my officials should work alongside their counterparts in DRD to jointly lead a project to seek to establish a consortium to progress a bid for a pilot electric vehicle project in Northern Ireland.

The consortium will be bidding for seed funding from the UK wide £30m "Plugged in Places" scheme which aims to install electric vehicle infrastructure in up to 6 cities or regions across the UK. The "Plugged in Places" money will be available to consortia made of local authorities, businesses, electricity distributors, suppliers and other organisations in order to support the early market for electric vehicles.

If successful Northern Ireland will be at the forefront of the rollout of electric vehicles and one of a handful of areas across the UK where lessons learned will be used to inform the future development of a national recharging infrastructure.

Light Pollution

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of the Environment how many complaints his Department received in relation to light pollution in each of the last five years; and what enforcement action his Department has taken.

(AQW 5945/10)

Minister of the Environment: No records are held centrally by the Department in respect of complaints about light pollution, as the Department has no powers currently available to it to deal with such complaints.

The Department is however currently consulting on a proposal in the draft Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Bill to create a new statutory nuisance in respect of artificial light emitted from premises so as to be prejudicial to health or a nuisance. This is similar to that which was introduced in England and Wales in the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005 and would be enforced by district councils.

Artificial light nuisance is not necessarily the same as light pollution. It is a source of light that, in the opinion of a trained public health official who makes an assessment on a case by case basis, interferes with someone's use of their property and is, or might be, prejudicial to someone's health. Light pollution, on the other hand, can be defined as any form of light which shines outside the area it needs to illuminate, including light that is directed above the horizontal line into the sky creating sky glow or which creates a danger by glare.

Although light pollution can affect our view of the night sky, and interfere with astronomy, it is not necessarily also a light nuisance and therefore the statutory nuisance regime is not an appropriate tool for dealing with light pollution per se.

Fairtrade Status

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of the Environment which towns and cities have achieved 'Fairtrade' status, broken down by Council area.

(AQW 5948/10)

Minister of the Environment: I have been advised by the Fairtrade Foundation UK and Fairtrade Mark Ireland, who are responsible for granting Fairtrade status in Northern Ireland, that Belfast, Dundonald village, which is located within Castlereagh Borough Council, and Newry and Warrenpoint, which are located in Newry and Mourne District Council, have been granted Fairtrade status.

New Pitches Near the Burrenbridge Road, Newcastle

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 4604/10, (i) 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, given that a meeting between Jim Wells MLA and Roads Service took place on 9 February 2010; and (ii) to outline Roads Service's assessment of this application.

(AQW 5966/10)

Minister of the Environment: The application was taken to Council as an approval on 26 October 2009 and subsequently I have held a meeting with Jim Wells MLA, Planning Service and Roads Service officials, giving further consideration to road safety issues. Roads Service is content with the proposal subject to a number of conditions and the decision notice will be issued when the appropriate road safety conditions have been finalised.

Road Fund Licences

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister of the Environment how much revenue has been generated from road fund licences in each of the last three years.

(AQW 6006/10)

Minister of the Environment: The vehicle excise duty (motor tax) collected in Northern Ireland on behalf of the Department for Transport in the last three years was as follows -

2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
£143m	£155m	£163m

Vehicles Without Road Tax

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister of the Environment for an estimate of the number of vehicles currently without road tax.

(AQW 6007/10)

Minister of the Environment: Vehicle licensing is an excepted matter which is the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Transport. It is administered in Northern Ireland by the Driver & Vehicle Agency

under a formal agreement between DoE and the Department for Transport (DfT). The rate of evasion of vehicle excise duty is measured annually by DfT through roadside surveys carried out across the UK. The 2009 survey showed that the rate of evasion "in traffic" in Northern Ireland is currently 0.8%.

Inaccurate Flooding maps

Mr D O'Loan asked the Minister of the Environment if he is aware that, when assessing one-off planning applications in the countryside and the potential risk of flooding, the Planning Service relies on flooding maps which are not accurate to local detail, therefore putting the onus on the applicant to challenge at his expense an initial opinion to refuse an application; and (ii) whether he will liaise with the Rivers Agency to find a resolution.

(AQW 6013/10)

Minister of the Environment: Where a flood risk is known to exist my Department will pay particular regard to current policy set out in PPS15: Planning and Flood Risk when determining planning applications.

All planning applications are determined with reference to the Strategic Flood Map for Northern Ireland which was developed by DARD Rivers Agency in consultation with my officials. As the Map provides a strategic overview of the areas estimated to be at risk from flooding my Department also uses other sources of information to inform planning decisions such as local evidence and detailed study maps where these are available.

DARD Rivers Agency is currently consulted by my Department for advice on applications within flood plains on the Strategic Flood Map in most cases.

Where new development within a flood plain would result in a significant flood risk my Department may refuse planning applications on these grounds. If an application is refused the applicant has the right of appeal to the Planning Appeals Commission and must bear any expense at appeal.

It is the responsibility of the applicant to identify potential flood risk as early in the development process as possible and demonstrate how the development can be made safe through design and flood resilient construction and that it does not increase flood risk elsewhere.

Graves

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment if he can confirm that a 2.4 metre by 950 mm and 10 feet in depth walled grave meets with current regulations.

(AQW 6025/10)

Minister of the Environment: If a cemetery or graveyard benefits from planning permission or has been established for a number of years individual graves do not require separate planning consent as they are considered ancillary to the use of the land as a cemetery.

A grave within the curtilage of a dwelling house could potentially benefit from permitted development rights subject to conditions and limitations detailed in the Planning (General Development) Order (NI) 1993 (as amended). In any other location a grave would constitute operational development and require planning permission. There are of course environmental health regulations associated with burial which is the responsibility of the relevant District Council.

Department of Finance and Personnel

Staff Grievances by Civil Servants

Mr A McQuillan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to AQW 4516/10, if any disciplinary procedures were instigated against the staff whose actions resulted in the successful grievance claims.

(AQW 5558/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr S Wilson): Pursuant to AQW 4516/10, due to differing recording methods in Departments and the absence of a central database recording the statistics, the figures are not readily available. Therefore I am unable to provide a definitive response.

Civil Servants Employed by the Inland Revenue

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel why civil servants employed by the Inland Revenue cannot transfer to positions in other Departments.

(AQW 5709/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: As the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) and the Home Civil Service (HCS) are two legally separate services, staff cannot normally move directly between the two. However, in exceptional circumstances, my department may allow requests from HCS staff to move to the NICS to be considered by NI Departments in the context of the business needs of the NICS. Such transfers occur only in very exceptional cases and where it is not reasonably practicable to make the appointment in accordance with the merit principle.

Currently the NICS has a number of surplus staff (at various grades) and is working to redeploy staff across Departments. A temporary embargo on recruitment and promotion to the general service grades (Administrative Assistant (AA) – Grade 6) is in place. In such circumstances requests to transfer into the NICS could not be considered.

Bonuses Paid to Non-Civil Servants

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for a breakdown of any bonuses paid in the 2009/10 financial year to persons, other than civil servants, from within the Department's overall budget.

(AQW 5819/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: No persons, other than civil servants, received bonuses in the 2009/10 financial year from within the Department's overall budget.

Occupied Properties Incorrectly Listed as Vacant in 2008-09

Mr R Beggs asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel (i) to outline the terms agreed between Land and Property Services and each local council to identify the occupied properties that were incorrectly listed as vacant in 2008/09; (ii) to detail (a) the agreed payment to be made to each council; and (b) the actual amount paid to each council; and (iii) why the contracts agreed are not being honoured.[R]

(AQW 5838/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: In 2008, LPS working in partnership with District Councils, undertook a full programme of inspection of properties. The properties included those properties which were recorded as vacant or where no bills had issued due to difficulties obtaining full occupancy details.

The terms agreed with each Council were to:

- undertake an examination of all vacant property in its District;
- establish which properties were occupied or vacant for rate assessment and collection purposes;

- provide full details of occupiers/owners where a property was found to be in rateable occupation;
- send occupancy/ownership information to LPS on a pro forma provided by LPS.

The agreed payment to be made to Council was £7 per completed inspection sheet returned to LPS.

The actual amount paid to each Council is given in the table below.

Council	Amount Paid
Antrim	£10,199.09
Ards	£20,530.15
Armagh	£24,302.46
Ballymena	£13,930.84
Ballymoney	£1,829.00
Banbridge	£13,378.04
Belfast	£92,071.00
Carrickfergus	£9,437.60
Castlereagh	£10,822.55
Coleraine	£15,586.20
Cookstown	£13,874.97
Craigavon	£19,370.80
Derry	£24,569.60
Down	£24,777.00
Dungannon/S Tyrone	£2,483.40
Fermanagh	£29,302.69
Larne	£9,796.85
Limavady	£7,779.80
Lisburn	£26,607.00
Moyle	£7,009.84
Newry/Mourne	£28,620.00
Newtownabbey	£20,041.69
North Down	£14,938.00
Omagh	£13,699.29
Strabane	£16,133.45

Magherafelt Council declined to take part in the exercise.

All invoices submitted by the Councils were paid in full.

At the outset of this exercise LPS had intended that the cost of the exercise would not be charged to the district rate, however legal and accounting advice was unequivocal – that the costs must be added to the cost of collection. The amount was split under the terms of Rate Regulations between the regional and district rates.

Each Council was therefore advised in May 2009 that the annual cost of collection figure for each Council included a charge to the district rate for the Vacancy Exercise which was undertaken by Councils on behalf of LPS.

Business Rates

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how much revenue has been collected through business rates in each local council area, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 5843/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: Rate payments receipted in the current rating year to 21 March 2010 for non-domestic properties totalled £519,522,308. Table 1 attached breaks this down by District Council.

Information contained within the rate collection computer system cannot be split between domestic and non-domestic for previous year's receipts.

TABLE 1 NON-DOMESTIC AND MIXED RATE RECEIPTS FROM 1 APRIL 2009 TO 21 MARCH 2010 BY DISTRICT COUNCIL AND SECTOR

District Council	Mixed	Non-Domestic
Totals	-£10,603,659	-£519,522,308
Antrim	-£598,165	-£18,722,820
Ards	-£413,287	-£11,099,200
Armagh	-£312,265	-£9,412,121
Ballymena	-£456,433	-£18,169,780
Ballymoney	-£179,977	-£3,497,893
Banbridge	-£241,587	-£7,321,918
Belfast	-£1,251,667	-£177,621,710
Carrickfergus	-£57,037	-£8,321,211
Castlereagh	-£591,293	-£16,030,325
Coleraine	-£582,877	-£16,430,829
Cookstown	-£355,169	-£6,971,830
Craigavon	-£613,633	-£21,757,806
Derry	-£257,581	-£36,430,649
Down	-£520,689	-£10,357,604
Dungannon & S.Tyrone	-£376,967	-£10,259,137
Fermanagh	-£688,745	-£13,482,143
Larne	-£141,760	-£9,260,984
Limavady	-£186,506	-£5,653,201
Lisburn	-£596,626	-£27,141,521
Magherafelt	-£367,819	-£6,192,850
Moyle	-£215,317	-£2,188,366

District Council	Mixed	Non-Domestic
Newry & Mourne	-£450,339	-£20,679,217
Newtownabbey	-£393,170	-£25,329,824
North Down	-£168,202	-£19,132,008
Omagh	-£376,052	-£11,388,485
Strabane	-£210,499	-£6,668,877

Notes :

- 1) Totals may not add up exactly due to roundings.
- 2) £10,603, 659 rates were receipted against properties that had both a domestic and non-domestic valuation (Mixed sector in table 1). These receipts cannot be broken down into the domestic and non-domestic elements.

Unpaid Business Rates

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how much revenue has been lost in unpaid business rates as a result of companies going into administration or becoming insolvent in each local council area, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 5845/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: LPS does not hold the information requested. The rate collection computer system does not sub categorise rates forgone as a result of companies going into administration or becoming insolvent.

Spend per Capita on Health

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the spend per capita on health in Northern Ireland compared to the rest of the UK.

(AQW 5914/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The latest figures from the HM Treasury publication Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses (PESA) 2009 indicate that the planned level of Health spending per head of population in Northern Ireland was £1,835 in 2008-09 compared to £1,795 for the rest of the United Kingdom.

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety**Chief Executives and other Executive Members of Health and Social Care Trusts**

Mr J Craig asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) why Chief Executives and other Executive members of Health and Social Care Trusts receive 'benefits in kind' and 'performance pay'; (ii) what these benefits are awarded for; and (iii) what work the Chief Executives in each Trust received these benefits for in each of the last five years.

(AQW 4488/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Mr M McGimpsey): The "benefits in kind" shown in the Trust Annual Accounts is the monetary value that HM Revenue & Customs place on the worth of a leased car; it is not a payment that is made directly to the Trust's Senior Executive. Under the terms of the employment contract Health and Social Care organisations may offer a leased car to employees whom they require to be mobile and where they deem it in the interest of the service to do so. The leased car scheme does not represent a cost to the public purse, because the lease payment to the car supplier are covered in full by payments by the member of staff and the costs of travel on

business. When comparing the cost of a leased car with paying standard mileage rates the leased car option proves less costly to the HSC. However, access to the scheme is treated by HMRC as a benefit in kind, tax implications for the individual of having a leased car.

Health and Social Care Trust Chief Executives and Directors are employed under contracts that provide them with a single annual percentage increase on their basic pay. This percentage increase is based on how well they have achieved the performance targets set for them in the previous year. There is no automatic entitlement to any increase under these employment contracts.

Domiciliary Care

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the average cost of maintaining a patient who remains in a hospital setting because of a lack of domiciliary care and the average cost of a patient receiving domiciliary care.

(AQW 5068/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The average cost of a patient receiving domiciliary care from Health and Social Care Trusts is £13.19 per hour. It should however be noted that the amount of care received by individual clients will vary considerably.

The average daily cost of maintaining a patient in a hospital setting is approximately £261 per day.

Information is based on 2007/08, uplifted for inflation, as 2008/09 not yet available.

Health Service Dentists

Mr C McDevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many patients in total have been registered under the Health Service arrangements with dentists in the South Belfast constituency in each of the last four quarters.

(AQW 5164/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The numbers of Health Service patients registered with a principal dentist in the South Belfast constituency in the four quarters of 2009 are shown in the table below:

Quarter	Q1 2009	Q2 2009	Q3 2009	Q4 2009
Date	Jan09-Mar09	Apr09-Jun09	Jul09-Sep09	Oct09-Dec09
Number of patients registered ¹	36,847	32,907	31,966	32,543

Source: Family Practitioner Services - HSC Business Services Organisation

Notes:

- 1 The figures given for number of patients registered include all patients registered at any time during the quarter. Patients were still counted even if they were not registered for the full 3 month period.

Health Service Dentists

Mr C McDevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many dentists in the South Belfast constituency registered new patients under the Health Service arrangements during the period 1 September 2009 to 31 December 2009; and how many new patients were registered or re-registered during this period.

(AQW 5165/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Figures provided by Family Practitioner Services - HSC Business Services Organisation show that 59 principal dentists working in the South Belfast

constituency registered 4,728 new patients between mid August 2009 to mid December 2009. Figures are for Principal dentists only; assistants and Vocational Dental Practitioners are not included.

‘Invest to Save’ Initiative

Dr S Farry asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety 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 5166/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department made 37 bids to the Invest to Save programme. The outcome of these bids has not been confirmed and I look forward to Executive consideration.

Included in the Department’s bids are schemes to support the reform of health and social care, schemes to modernise catering and laundry services, schemes that utilise modern telecoms and software solutions and schemes designed to deliver modern community based support services.

Organisations focussed their attention on the scale of savings that could be achieved and tied this in with the policy objectives of the Department. These include a commitment to fulfilling their equality obligations and to promoting inclusion. For example, providing community rather than hospital support services improves equality of access and in many cases allows more people to live as individuals with their own front door, or at least in their own area rather than in an institution.

‘Clear Space’ Requirements for Providers of Child-care

Mr R Beggs asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) to list the minimum ‘clear space’ requirements applicable during 2009 for providers of child-care to children aged (a) 0-2 years; (b) 2-3 years; (c) 3-5 years; and (d) 5-12 years, in each Health and Social Care Trust; (ii) to highlight any recent changes to these requirements; and (iii) what notice was given to child-care providers of any such changes.[R]

(AQW 5363/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:

- 1) The information requested on clear space for providers of childcare is set out in the table and notes below.
- 2) There were no recent changes to these clear space requirements. 3) Childcare providers did not require notification of any changes in clear space requirements.

CURRENT CLEAR SPACE REQUIREMENTS FOR EACH CHILD IN CHILDCARE (MEASURED IN SQUARE METRES)

Type of Childcare	From age 0 up to 2 years	From age 2 up to 3 years	From age 3 up to 5 years	From age 5 up to 12 years
Day Nursery	4.2	2.8	2.8	2.3
Crèche *	3.7	2.8	2.3	2.3
Play Group under 4 hours per day**	n/a	n/a	2.3 (pref.2.76 ST)	n/a
After School Care	n/a	n/a	n/a	2.3

* Southern HSC Trust

** South-Eastern and Southern HSC Trusts

Western Urgent Care Out-of-Hours Service

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if the Western Urgent Care Out-of-Hours service will face a reduction in cover from 5 to 3 doctors during the hours of 12 midnight to 8.30am from the 1 July 2010; and for his assessment of how this fits with his undertaking not to reduce front-line services.

(AQW 5380/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I can confirm that a paper has been sent to my Department which proposes a reduction in GP cover from 5 to 3 during the hours of 12 midnight to 8.30 am when, on average, only around 4 face-to-face consultations per GP per night currently take place. A nurse will be employed to triage calls. The 3 GPs will be mobile and cover all 5 existing Out-of-Hours Centres, and will continue to provide home visits where necessary. There will be a further 3 GPs on call if required on an unexpectedly busy night.

I am advised that the proposed reconfiguration of the service, tailored to actual demand, will maintain the delivery of a high quality, responsive service meeting response times for seeing patients as set out in NI Quality Standards.

Waiting Time for Appointment with a Registered Health Service Dentist

Mr C McDevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is the average waiting time for an appointment with a registered Health Service dentist in each ward in south Belfast; and for his assessment of whether there is a sufficient number of dentists in this area to adequately serve the population.

(AQW 5674/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: It is not possible to detail the average waiting time for appointments with registered Health Service dentists in south Belfast as the information is not collected centrally.

In south Belfast there are 79 dentists per 100,000 heads of population, which is the highest count of any parliamentary constituency here. I am satisfied that there are an adequate number of dental practitioners in south Belfast and throughout Northern Ireland. I have no plans to directly recruit additional dentists for this area.

Gorse Fires

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) to detail the total number of gorse fires recorded in (a) the hills around Belfast; and (b) all of Northern Ireland; (ii) how many of these fires were started as a result of arson or suspected arson; and (iii) the total cost to the Fire Service of attending and controlling the fires which were started by arsonists, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 5681/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Table 1 shows the number of gorse fires and indicates which were suspected of being started deliberately (D), or accidentally (A).

TABLE 1 – GORSE FIRES

Year	2005/06		2006/07		2007/08		2008/09		2009/10*	
	D	A	D	A	D	A	D	A	D	A
Belfast Hills	28	5	28	0	32	1	53	2	29	2
Total	33		28		33		55		31	

Year	2005/06		2006/07		2007/08		2008/09		2009/10*	
	D	A	D	A	D	A	D	A	D	A
Across Northern Ireland	3024	281	3916	406	2121	132	3551	311	2549	165
Total	3305		4322		2253		3862		2714	

* Up to 11 March 2010

The actual costs of attendance at gorse fires could be provided by the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS) only at a prohibitive cost. It has, therefore, provided an estimate of the costs incurred in attending deliberate gorse fires in each of the last five years. These are outlined in Table 2. The average cost per mobilisation is based on the total expenditure of NIFRS in any year.

TABLE 2 – GORSE FIRES: ESTIMATED COSTS

Year	Number of mobilisations to deliberate gorse fires	Average cost per mobilisation	Total cost
2005/06	3,024	£2,066	£6,247,584
2006/07	3,916	£2,225	£8,713,100
2007/08	2,121	£2,184	£4,632,264
2008/09	3, 551	£2,547	£9,044,397
2009/10*	2, 549	£2,547**	£6,492,303

* Up to 11 March 2010

** Final year costs not yet available; average costs based on 2008/09 data

Allegations of Ill-treatment of Patients Against Staff from Private Care Companies

Mr J Craig 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 South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust in each of the last three years.

(AQW 5706/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: There have been allegations of ill treatment of patients made against staff from private care companies contracted by the South Eastern HSC Trust within this period. All allegations are taken seriously and investigated under the relevant policy and procedures.

Child Protection Register

Mr J Craig asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of children on the Child Protection Register in the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust in each of the last five years, broken down by age and gender.

(AQW 5707/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information requested is detailed in Table 1 below. Figures for 2009 are due for publication on 16 April 2010.

Table 1 - Numbers of children on the Child Protection Register in the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust in each of the last five years, by age and gender

Age Band	Year									
	2004		2005		2006		2007		2008	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Under 1 year	11	13	18	10	18	10	24	18	22	17
1-4 years	39	35	42	33	41	45	65	52	70	54
5-11 years	80	71	84	80	64	65	89	67	88	65
12 and above	31	31	38	49	33	55	47	69	48	53
All Ages	161	150	182	172	156	175	225	206	228	189

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.

Allegations of Ill-treatment of Patients Against Staff in Residential or Care Homes

Mr J Craig asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if there have been any allegations of ill-treatment of patients made against staff in residential or care homes in the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust in each of the last three years.

(AQW 5708/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: There have been allegations of ill treatment of patients made against staff in residential or care homes in the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust within this period. All allegations are taken seriously and investigated under the relevant policy and procedures.

Regional Care Adviser for Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on funding for the Regional Care Adviser for Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy.

(AQW 5716/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: A business case for the recurrent funding of neuromuscular care adviser posts has been developed by the Belfast Trust and is currently being considered by the Health and Social Care Board.

Neuro-Physiotherapists

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many neuro-physiotherapists currently operate in each Health and Social Care Trust; and how many of these are designated to working with patients with Multiple Sclerosis.

(AQW 5723/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I refer the member to the answers to AQW 4338/10 (amended) and AQW 4399/10.

Appointment Waiting Times for Patients with Multiple Sclerosis

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the average; and (ii) the longest appointment waiting times for patients with Multiple Sclerosis in each Health and Social Care Trust in each of the last three years.

(AQW 5728/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information on the waiting time for a first outpatient appointment is collected by specialty and the length of time that a patient is waiting, in time bands.

The waiting time position for a first outpatient appointment in the Neurology specialty, at the 31st December 2009, the most recent date for which official statistics are available, was published in the Northern Ireland Waiting Times Bulletin, which can be found at the following link:

www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/waiting_times_dec09.pdf

Report of the Lymphoedema Services Review Group 2004

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety where lymphoedema patients will be able to access treatment in Fermanagh and South Tyrone under the recommendations of the Report of the Lymphoedema Services Review Group 2004; and when these services will be available.

(AQW 5730/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Lymphoedema Network Northern Ireland (LNNI) was established in February 2008 with a remit to co-ordinate and shape regional service development in order to provide a high standard of care accessible throughout the Province. The network is headed by a regional clinical lead, and supported in each Trust by a Trust lymphoedema lead.

The Western Trust was unable to appoint a suitable candidate at the same time as other Trusts; however, an appointment has recently been confirmed which has enabled the Trust to commence a service which is available to patients at both the Erne Hospital in Enniskillen and the Tyrone County Hospital in Omagh.

Neuro-Physiotherapists

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what he is doing to increase the number of neuro-physiotherapists available to treat patients with Multiple Sclerosis.

(AQW 5748/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department has recently established a short-term working group to look at the baseline of neuro-physiotherapy service in Northern Ireland including an assessment of staffing levels. Multiple Sclerosis sufferers are currently assessed and treated by physiotherapists with neuro-disability skills in the five Health and Social Care Trusts as part of their caseload.

Neuro-Physiotherapists

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many neuro-physiotherapists are available at the Ulster Hospital, Dundonald to treat patients with Multiple Sclerosis.

(AQW 5749/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: There are 3 (2.8 Whole-time Equivalent) neurophysiotherapists at the Ulster Hospital, Dundonald who as part of their caseload will treat patients with Multiple Sclerosis.

Suspected Cancer Patients

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he plans to mirror the pledge of the Labour party in England that anyone suspected of having cancer should be tested within seven days of the GP referral.

(AQW 5750/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: It should be noted that the Labour party's pledge to ensure that patients suspected of having cancer should be tested within seven days, is merely that; no formal target currently exists.

My Department, working with the Northern Ireland Cancer Network, has developed regional cancer referral pathways to ensure that patients with suspected cancer are treated within current targets, which are broadly in line with cancer targets in the rest of the UK.

Multiple Sclerosis

Mr M Storey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is the current average life expectancy of a person diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis; and how this compares to the rest of the UK.

(AQW 5753/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information requested is not available.

Miscarriage and Stillbirths

Mr M Storey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the incident rates for (i) miscarriage; and (ii) stillbirth in 2009/10; and how these compare to the rest of the UK.

(AQW 5755/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information is not available on the incident rates for (i) miscarriage or (ii) stillbirth in 2009/10.

Support Services to Play Groups and Day Nurseries

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, excluding the reduction in administration costs, why support services to play groups and day nurseries in the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust have been reduced by 45% at a time when these groups are experiencing child protection support needs and issues around quality, funding and sustainability.

(AQW 5756/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I refer you to my response to your previous question AQW 5198/10.

Obtaining an Appointment with a General Practitioner

Mr J Craig asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is the target timescale for patients to obtain an appointment with their General Practitioner; and how his Department monitors the target.

(AQW 5759/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Quality and Outcomes Framework (QOF) was introduced as part of the General Medical Services contract that came into effect in April 2004. QOF is a voluntary reward and incentive programme for all GP practices in Northern Ireland.

The standard set by QOF for patients to obtain an appointment with a GP or other appropriate health care professional is within 2 working days. If they prefer to see a specific GP they may have to wait a little longer.

From April 2008, the measurement of achievement against this QOF standard is through the national Patient Experience Survey conducted by Ipsos MORI. Results of the Patient Experience Survey are notified to the Health and Social Care Board as well as to the individual practices.

Patients Registered with a General Practitioner

Mr J Craig asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is the (i) minimum; and (ii) maximum number of patients that can be registered with a General Practitioner.

(AQW 5761/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The General Medical Services Contract (GMS), which was introduced on 1 April 2004, provides for a contract to be placed with a GMS contractor, and not an individual GP. The contract does not stipulate a recommended number of patients per contractor or GP but commissions the provision of general medical services in line with the requirements of the contract.

Mephedrone

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what liaison his Department has had with the Department of Health in England concerning mephedrone.

(AQW 5771/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: There has been growing concern about the use of legal highs, and Mephedrone in particular, across the UK and the Republic of Ireland. This issue has therefore been discussed extensively at the British-Irish Council Drug Misuse Sectoral Group. There have also been ongoing discussions between my Department, the Department of Health in Westminster, the Home Office and the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs (ACMD).

Following recent reports of the availability of Mephedrone and emerging evidence of its harms in Northern Ireland, I wrote to the Chair of the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs (ACMD) and the Home Secretary asking them to take this issue forward as a matter of urgency. I also spoke to the Home Secretary by telephone regarding this matter. The ACMD recommended on 29 March 2010 that Mephedrone, and all generic cathinones, should be classified as Class B drugs.

The Home Secretary has accepted this recommendation, and advised that Mephedrone will become illegal to possess or supply within weeks. In addition, its importation was banned with immediate effect.

Mephedrone

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action he intends to take on the issue of the availability of mephedrone.

(AQW 5773/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Following recent reports of the availability of Mephedrone and emerging evidence of its harms in Northern Ireland, I wrote to the Chair of the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs (ACMD) and the Home Secretary asking them to take this issue forward as a matter of urgency. The ACMD recommended on 29 March 2010 that Mephedrone, and all generic cathinones, should be classified as Class B drugs.

The Home Secretary has accepted this recommendation, and advised that Mephedrone will become illegal to possess or supply within weeks. In addition, its importation was banned with immediate effect.

Allied Health Professions Strategy

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 2190/10, when the Allied Health Professions strategy will be completed and issued for consultation.

(AQW 5776/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The AHP strategy currently being developed will provide the opportunity to set out the overall vision, shape and nature of AHP services to meet the future needs of the population.

I expect to be in a position to issue the strategy for consultation before the end of the summer 2010.

Vacant Therapist Posts in the Southern Health and Social Care Trust

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 2192/10, how many vacant posts currently exist for (i) Occupational Therapist; (ii) Physiotherapists; and (iii) Speech and Language Therapist in the Southern Health and Social Care Trust; and when they will be filled.

(AQW 5778/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information requested is provided in the table below. The Trust has sought to identify the posts currently known to be vacant which are actively being recruited to at the present time. It should be noted that this is subject to ongoing change.

Southern Trust Vacancies	
Professions	WTE
Occupational Therapists	2.80
Physiotherapists	5.42
Speech & Language Therapists	1.5

Source: Southern Health and Social Care Trust

Notes:

1. WTE = whole time equivalent

The Southern Trust has assured me that these posts are currently being recruited to following the normal recruitment process and timeline.

Adoption Strategy

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when the Adoption Strategy will be published; and if it has been delayed in the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister. **(AQW 5780/10)**

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I issued a draft paper to the Executive seeking agreement to the development of an Adoption and Children Bill in June 2009. To date responses to this draft paper have been received from nine Departments, with one response still outstanding from the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM). Until comments have been received from OFMDFM in relation to the draft Executive paper, I am unable to progress the development of a new Adoption and Children Bill any further.

Early Years Organisation

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if health care providers in the Belfast Trust have been dissatisfied with any of the Early Years Organisation support services; and which services they deemed unsatisfactory. **(AQW 5783/10)**

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I understand that your question relates to the Early Years Organisation.

The Belfast Health and Social Care Trust have not received any complaints about the Early Years Organisation from health care providers.

Legal Highs

Mr R Beggs asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many admissions to Accident and Emergency Departments during the 2009/10 financial year can be attributed to the consumption of 'legal highs'.

(AQW 5789/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information on how many admissions to Accident and Emergency Departments can be attributed to the consumption of 'legal highs' is unavailable.

Royal Irish Regiment and Ulster Defence Regiment After Care Services

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if his Department is currently assisting, or been asked to assist, Royal Irish Regiment and Ulster Defence Regiment after care services.

(AQW 5792/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My officials have met with officers of the Royal Irish Regiment and Ulster Defence Regiment after care services, who gave a presentation on their work but did not seek assistance in any form.

Enhanced Local Hospital in Omagh

Mr P Doherty asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in relation to the enhanced local hospital in Omagh, (i) to provide a timeline for the construction and completion of the hospital; (ii) if funding is in place to complete this project; (iii) to outline the source of this funding; and (iv) to detail the range of services for inpatients and outpatients to be provided at the hospital.

(AQW 5799/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Due to budget constraints facing my Department I cannot give a firm commitment to any project in the planning stage until I am able to confirm that the necessary funding is available. This applies to the Omagh Local Hospital as to all other planned projects. The Trust and my officials are working together to resolve a number of outstanding issues in relation to the business case. That said, I remain committed to the Omagh Hospital project and hope that it will progress as planned, but it is crucial that I ensure that the necessary funding is available to both construct and, as equally important, to operate the new facility, once completed, before I announce the way forward for this project. Cuts to my Department's budget make this difficult and it is something that I am monitoring closely.

Subject to funding it is planned that the new facility, which was approved by the Assembly, once fully operational, will provide a range of services including; Care of the Elderly, Cardiology, Renal Dialysis, Day Surgery, Doctor-led Urgent Care and Treatment Centre, Pharmacy, Laboratory, Imaging, Children's Centre, Outpatients including obstetrics and gynaecology, and Clinical Investigation. This is as well as a Mental Health Unit and the provision of GP services

Out-Of-Hours Services in the Strabane District

Mr P Doherty asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he plans to change the operation of out-of-hours services in the Strabane district; and whether these proposals will be subject to a statutory consultation and Equality Impact Assessment.

(AQW 5800/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I refer the member to the answer provided to AQW 5380/10.

As there will be no change to the way patients access out-of-hours services after midnight, and patients will not be affected adversely in terms of age, marital status, gender, disability, dependents, political

opinion, racial group, religious belief or sexual orientation, the proposed reconfiguration of the service will not be subject to a statutory consultation and Equality Impact Assessment.

Partnerships in Care UK

Rt Hon J Donaldson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why the Health Service has been unable to provide adequate facilities for patients requiring psychiatric or mental health care and has had to contract this work to Partnerships in Care UK.

(AQW 5824/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I refer the member to the answer I gave to AQW 5766/10 on 26 March 2010.

Mephedrone and Other Legal Highs

Mr T Gallagher asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) for his assessment of the extent of the use of mephedrone and other 'legal highs'; and (ii) how many people have been treated in hospitals as a result of using such substances in the last twelve months.

(AQW 5934/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:

(i) There has been growing concern within Northern Ireland, and across the UK and in the Republic of Ireland, about the use of "legal highs" including mephedrone. We have no recorded information on the prevalence of the use of "legal highs", although there are anecdotal accounts of its availability and use in Northern Ireland. In future there will be a question on the use of "legal highs" in the All-Ireland Drug Prevalence Survey, which will be conducted in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland later this year.

It is the duty of the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs (ACMD) to advise Ministers on appropriate measures to be taken with respect to drugs which are being, or appear to it are likely to be, misused and which are causing or may cause a social problem. Following recent reports of the availability of mephedrone and emerging evidence of its harms, the ACMD is now looking at this issue as a priority, and is due to report at the end of March 2010. The Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs is likely to be recommending to the UK Government further action including probable legal controls on mephedrone.

(ii) Information is not available on the number of hospital admissions that could be related to the suspected consumption of mephedrone or other so-called "legal highs".

Diabetes Clinic at Roe Valley Hospital, Limavady

Mr B Leonard asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether the Diabetes Clinic in Roe Valley Hospital, Limavady will remain open and if staff vacancies will be filled in the normal manner so that the facility remains fully operational.

(AQW 5975/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Western Health and Social Care Trust is responsible for the configuration of local services. The Trust has advised me that it intends to keep the Diabetes Clinic at the Roe Valley Hospital operational and will recruit staff as necessary to fill vacancies.

Dermatology Clinic at Roe Valley Hospital in Limavady

Mr B Leonard asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, given that the Dermatology Clinic at Roe Valley Hospital in Limavady has been closed for two weeks because of

a consultancy vacancy, whether the Western Health and Social Care Trust knew of this impending vacancy; and what recruitment process is in place to fill the vacancy.

(AQW 5998/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Western Health and Social Care Trust administers its staff recruitment process. The Consultant responsible for the dermatology clinic at Roe Valley Hospital gave the necessary notice to the Trust of his intention to retire; since this time the Trust has been working through the required recruitment process.

The Trust has advised me that the dermatology clinic is not closed but that it is actively seeking a locum replacement for the Consultant who is currently on annual leave and will retire from 1st April.

Department for Regional Development

Road Bonds

Mr J O'Dowd asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 5010/10, how much money has been recovered from developers' road bonds in order to complete the projects outlined.
(AQW 5660/10)

Minister for Regional Development (Mr C Murphy): Details of the amount of money recovered to date, by my Department's Roads Service from developers' road bonds, in order to complete roads in developments, in each of the last two years, broken down by council area, are set out in the tables below:

Amount of money recovered from developers' road bonds in 2008/09	
Council Area	Amount
Coleraine	£7,185.00
Armagh	£72,693.37
Craigavon	£90,982.41
Ards	£20,050.70
Newry & Mourne	£20,546.21
Castlereagh	£62,542.00
Carrickfergus	£5,755.51
Newtownabbey	£12,444.00
Total	£292,199.20

Amount of money recovered from developers' road bonds in 2009/10	
Council Area	Amount
Newtownabbey	£3,660.05
Total	£3,660.05

Utility Companies

Mr J Craig asked the Minister for Regional Development what sanctions his Department can impose on utility companies which do not restore roads back to the required standard after carrying out work; and what action he has taken against such companies in each of the last three years.

(AQW 5713/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that where a utility company fails to reinstate a road opening to the specified standard, Roads Service has powers to require the utility company to carry out remedial works and, at the utility company's expense, to inspect those remedial works while in progress and on completion. The defect inspection fees charged to utility companies over the last three years have amounted to £32,000 in 2006/07, £11,600 in 2007/08 and £27,900 in 2008/09, rounded to the nearest £100.

Road Service has also advised that where more than 10% of utility reinstatements are found, through sample inspections, to be defective, the utility is required to prepare and implement an agreed improvement plan. Two such improvement plans have been implemented in each of the last three years.

Roads Service also has powers to prosecute utilities, which may lead to a fine not exceeding level five on the standard scale (£5,000), where reinstatements are not to the required standard. Roads Service reserves this sanction for cases where public safety has been compromised. Two prosecutions were taken in 2006/07 on offences, including failure to reinstate to the specified standards, and two further such prosecutions were taken in 2008/09. There were no such prosecutions taken in 2007/08.

St. Patrick's Day 2010 Celebrations

Mr T Burns asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the total expenditure incurred by her Department in relation to the St. Patrick's Day 2010 celebrations in the Holyland area of Belfast; and for a summary of how this money was spent.

(AQW 5811/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department did not incur any expenditure in relation to the St. Patrick's Day 2010 celebrations in the Holyland area of Belfast.

Road Maintenance and Capital Scheme Spending

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister for Regional Development how much has been spent in each District Council area on (i) road maintenance; and (ii) capital schemes in (a) 2005/06; (b) 2006/07; (c) 2007/08; and (d) 2008/09.

(AQW 5814/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service expenditure on Operation and Maintenance activities and Capital Schemes in each District Council Area, for which information is available, is set out in the table below:-

District Council	Operation and Maintenance			
	05-06 £	06-07 £	07-08 £	08-09 £
Antrim	4,218,000	3,251,000	3,494,000	3,507,000
Coleraine	3,960,000	4,139,000	4,449,000	4,275,000
Limavady	3,327,000	2,737,000	3,573,000	2,830,000
Moyle	2,111,000	1,860,000	2,093,000	1,674,000
Ballymoney	2,410,000	2,283,000	2,430,000	2,395,000

District Council	Operation and Maintenance			
	05-06 £	06-07 £	07-08 £	08-09 £
Derry	5,324,000	5,281,000	5,828,000	5,876,000
Ballymena	5,493,000	4,432,000	4,537,000	5,168,000
Larne	2,632,000	2,754,000	2,546,000	2,238,000
Belfast	15,576,000	13,730,000	16,990,000	13,976,000
Castlereagh	3,149,000	3,029,000	3,552,000	3,429,000
Newtownabbey	2,418,000	3,189,000	4,576,000	3,388,000
Carrickfergus	1,296,000	1,764,000	1,971,000	1,642,000
North Down	4,160,000	3,640,000	3,974,000	2,962,000
Lisburn	6,245,000	5,695,000	4,948,000	7,704,000
Ards	3,706,000	3,468,000	5,014,000	3,394,000
Armagh	6,011,000	5,477,000	7,539,000	7,013,000
Newry and Mourne	6,839,000	5,843,000	6,212,000	5,372,000
Banbridge	4,008,000	3,841,000	3,996,000	3,404,000
Craigavon	5,241,000	5,217,000	5,478,000	4,219,000
Down	4,914,000	4,503,000	4,262,000	5,813,000
Magherafelt	3,242,000	2,612,000	3,834,000	3,239,000
Omagh	6,004,000	5,587,000	6,487,000	5,699,000
Strabane	4,758,000	4,746,000	5,258,000	5,068,000
Cookstown	2,605,000	2,857,000	2,759,000	2,739,000
Fermanagh	6,142,000	6,737,000	6,598,000	7,036,000
Dungannon	5,395,000	5,477,000	5,781,000	5,391,000
Totals	121,184,000	114,149,000	128,179,000	119,451,000

District Council	Capital Spend			
	05-06 £	06-07 £	07-08 £	08/09 £
Antrim	1,901,000	2,801,000	1,970,000	848,000
Coleraine	2,152,000	1,380,000	2,090,000	1,745,000
Limavady	1,390,000	1,145,000	1,450,000	1,406,000
Moyle	383,000	177,000	287,000	464,000
Ballymoney	3,753,000	1,223,000	510,000	670,000
Derry	9,165,000	3,754,000	8,492,000	19,397,000
Ballymena	2,343,000	1,910,000	6,170,000	4,920,000

District Council	Capital Spend			
	05-06 £	06-07 £	07-08 £	08/09 £
Larne	1,825,000	346,000	1,216,000	2,074,000
Belfast	7,246,000	26,628,000	6,116,000	11,503,000
Castlereagh	8,440,000	835,000	1,316,000	444,000
Newtownabbey	3,476,000	1,578,000	1,965,000	2,219,000
Carrickfergus	1,712,000	2,566,000	4,849,000	4,165,000
North Down	1,892,000	1,916,000	1,770,000	1,218,000
Lisburn	3,855,000	3,673,000	2,686,000	2,345,000
Ards	1,790,000	1,725,000	1,960,000	8,667,000
Armagh	2,270,000	1,677,000	3005,000	2,446,000
Newry and Mourne	17,692,000	62,010,000	14,863,000	4,627,000
Banbridge	2,262,000	2,221,000	887,000	1,251,000
Craigavon	4,879,000	1,803,000	1,658,000	1,704,000
Down	2,679,000	1,539,000	986,000	1,341,000
Magherafelt	1,344,000	966,000	2,651,000	2,544,000
Omagh	7,869,000	3,455,000	4,387,000	11,534,000
Strabane	3,006,000	2,067,000	1,296,000	695,000
Cookstown	975,000	1,078,000	865,000	1,135,000
Fermanagh	4,137,000	2,121,000	4,017,000	8,607,000
Dungannon	5,401,000	15,361,000	14,235,000	4,622,000
Totals	103,837,000	145,955,000	91,697,000	102,591,000

Note, that Roads Service expenditure on Operation and Maintenance, includes Structural Maintenance, Highways Structures, Routine Maintenance, Traffic Maintenance, Winter Maintenance, Street Lighting Maintenance, Car Parking Maintenance and EU schemes.

I should also explain that Roads Service does not simply split its total budget for capital expenditure on roads across all the District Council areas. Major road improvements are prioritised on a countrywide basis, taking account of a broad range of criteria such as strategic planning policy, traffic flow, number of accidents, potential for reducing travel times, environmental impact, accessibility and value for money. While the actual spend on a major works scheme may be within one District Council area, the benefits of such schemes are not confined to the District Council, constituency or county in which they are completed.

Bonuses Paid to Non-Civil Servants

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister for Regional Development for a breakdown of any bonuses paid in the 2009/10 financial year to persons, other than civil servants, from within the Department's overall budget.

(AQW 5858/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department has not paid any bonuses to persons, other than civil servants, from within the Department's overall budget.

Cost of Legal Fees

Mr J Craig asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 5513/10, what proportion of legal costs were (i) paid by his Department to external legal firms; and (ii) incurred by his Department's internal solicitor or legal team.

(AQW 5862/10)

Minister for Regional Development: The legal costs have been apportioned on a percentile basis and are set out in the table below. When reading these figures it is important to note that claimants' legal costs are only paid where a claim succeeds. Most claimants are legally-aided and the Department cannot recover defence costs against such claimants. Consequently the percentile figure for costs paid to the Department Solicitor's Office (DSO) comprises the costs of conducting all litigation, which includes both successful and unsuccessful claimants' actions.

Year	Percentile Apportionment of Legal Costs	
	Claimant's Legal Costs	Dso Costs
2008/09	53.3	46.7
2007/08	57.2	42.8
2006/07	50.7	49.3
2005/06	48.7	51.3
2004/05	47.4	52.6

Claims for Falls and Injuries

Mr J Craig asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 5514/10, why the cost of claims against his Department for falls and injuries was so high in the Lisburn Council area compared to the Banbridge Council area in (i) 2006/07; (ii) 2007/08; and (iii) 2008/09.

(AQW 5868/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Central Claims Unit maintains claims statistics on the basis of Roads Service Section Office areas. The higher Lisburn Section Office area cost of claims statistics are explained by three main factors. These are:-

1. A higher population density. The Lisburn Section Office maintenance area includes Lisburn city and a western part of Belfast city.
2. The length of the adopted highway is greater in the Lisburn Section Office maintenance area. It comprises 1,110 carriageway and 745 footway kilometres compared to 1,047.7 carriageway and 247.4 footway kilometres in the Banbridge Section Office maintenance area. Most personal injury claims occur on footways.
3. The records disclose a greater proportion of higher value High Court claims for the Lisburn Section Office. By way of explanation on this point, 61% of the cost of claims for 2007/08 for Lisburn Section Office is accounted for by five High Court cases.

Consideration to Blind People and People with Disabilities

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development what consideration is given to (i) blind people; and (ii) people with disabilities when (a) Roads Service; and (b) NI Water are carrying out work on pavements and roads.

(AQW 5873/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the legal requirements for signing at road works are set out in Chapter 8 of the Traffic Signs Manual 2009, which deals with traffic safety measures and signs for road works and temporary situations. The manual provides guidance on meeting those legal requirements, including how to address the special needs of people with visual, and other mobility impairments, and persons with prams or wheelchairs. Protection for people with a visual impairment will generally require that road works sites should be guarded on those sides accessible to pedestrians. In addition, there must be a pedestrian barrier which can be readily detected by a visually impaired person using a stick. The manual also defines the requirements for ramps to facilitate wheelchair users and pushchairs. Roads Service complies with these requirements when carrying out work on pavements and roads.

Article 25 (1) of the Street Works (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 requires that an undertaker executing street works shall ensure that any part of the street, which is broken up or open, or is obstructed by plant or materials used, or deposited in connection with the works, is adequately guarded and lit. In addition, that traffic signs are placed, maintained and where necessary operated, as reasonably required for the guidance, or direction of persons using the street, having regard, in particular, to the needs of people with a disability. Northern Ireland Water (NIW) is deemed to have satisfied their obligations under Article 25, if they comply with the Code of Practice on Safety at Street Works and Road Works. This code of practice is consistent with the requirements of Chapter 8 of the Traffic Signs Manual.

NIW has advised that extensive consultation is undertaken with local Councils, residents and business owners, before and during the design and construction of its capital projects. The needs of the local community and the travelling public are taken into account during this consultation process, and as part of the normal management of projects, all construction sites are monitored and independently inspected to ensure adherence to the health and safety rules. All construction work is properly guarded and signed in accordance with current health and safety legislation.

Particular attention is paid to members of the community with a disability, so that inadvertent access to the construction site is restricted, and that access to and from places of business, or residences, is both possible and safe. In addition, many of the contractors working for NIW are members of the Considerate Constructors Scheme, a scheme where the contractors are monitored by an experienced industry professional to assess their performance against the eight point Company Code of Considerate Practice. The Code includes the categories Considerate, Environment, Cleanliness, Good Neighbour, Respectful, Safe, Responsible and Accountable.

Roads Service and NI Water Consultations

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail what consultation is undertaken between Roads Service and NI Water before they undertake schemes of work in any area.

(AQW 5874/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that consultation between Roads Service and Northern Ireland Water (NIW), in advance of schemes of work in any area, is undertaken in line with the Code of Practice for the Co-ordination of Street Works and Works for Road Purposes and Related Matter.

The Code of Practice sets out formal minimum periods of notice to be provided for individual works through the NI Streetworks Registration and Notification System. Roads Service arranges six-monthly meetings of its four Divisions with the Utility Committees. These meetings involve consideration of specific major projects, medium term and annual works programmes, both capital and maintenance for my Department and the utility companies, including NIW.

NIW has advised that it undertakes extensive consultation with Roads Service prior to undertaking construction work on public roads. Roads Service is contacted at an early stage of any project to outline the proposal, and to obtain general advice regarding road works. This initial advice will often affect the proposals, for example, changes in the route selection, method of construction and reinstatement, or the general timing of the construction. This consultation continues as the proposal

is further developed, until Roads Service agreement and approval is granted prior to the start of construction.

Utilities such as NIW must follow Roads Service procedure for the notification of street works, and are required to give certain periods of notice to Roads Service on their proposed date to commence construction works. At each notice stage, Roads Service will consider the proposed dates and decide, for example, if the proposed start date conflicts, or interferes with other work, if certain conditions should be imposed or if the notice should be refused. NIW is unable to commence construction work until the full notice procedure is completed, and agreed by Roads Service.

Grit Boxes in the North Down Constituency

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the location of grit boxes in the North Down constituency.

(AQW 5875/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it does not hold information on the location of salt boxes on a constituency basis. However, the table below details the location of salt boxes in the North Down Section Office area, the boundary of which is coterminous with that of North Down District Council.

- Cultra Slip Road, Belfast bound to Folk Museum, Holywood
- Abbots Wood, near junction Demesne Road, Holywood
- Strathearn Court at Street Light (S/L) No. 1, Holywood
- Cedar Grove, opposite S/L No.4, Holywood
- The Green at S/L No.1, Holywood
- Inver Park, opposite S/L No.4, Holywood
- Demense Park at No.15, at wall, Holywood
- Demense Avenue at No.15, Holywood
- Elizabeth Road, opposite S/L No.3, Holywood
- Ardmore Road at S/L No.6, Holywood
- Ardmore Heights, opposite No.9 at S/L No.6, Holywood
- Ardmore Road, past No.39, near radius, Holywood
- Glenview Road at No.7, Holywood
- Glenview Avenue opposite S/L No.3, Holywood
- Ardmore Park at No.3, Holywood
- Brook Street at Clinic, Holywood
- Windsor Avenue at No.12, Holywood
- Victoria Road at end of grass verge, Holywood
- Tudor Oaks, No 3, at wall, Holywood
- Old Quay Court at No.4, Holywood
- Kintyre Avenue at S/L No.5, Holywood
- Princess Gardens at S/L No.15, Holywood
- Princess Park, opposite No.9, Holywood
- Torgrange at No.10, near S/L, Holywood
- Invergourie Road at Stathleven Park name plate, Holywood

- Brown's Brae opposite No.5, Hollywood
- The Spires at S/L No 3, Hollywood
- Woodcroft Park outside No 3, Hollywood
- Creighton's Green Road before speed limit sign 1/3 on bend, Hollywood
- Creighton's Green Road down from No.15 on bend, Hollywood
- Creighton's Green Road down from No.41 on RHS at field gate, Hollywood
- Carlston Avenue at No.1/Whinney Hill, Hollywood
- Martello Park at No.10, Hollywood
- Martello Park at No 28, Hollywood
- Larch Hill at No.1 (half way up hill), Hollywood
- Larch Hill Drive at No.3, Hollywood
- Ballygrainey Road at No.3 (at wall near A2), Hollywood
- Ballygrainey Road opposite No.15, Hollywood
- Dalchoolin at No 19, Hollywood
- Cultra Avenue opposite No.41, Hollywood
- Tarawood at S/L No.1, Hollywood
- Carney Hill near junction A2, Hollywood
- Quarry Court past S/L No.2, Hollywood
- Grey Point at S/L No.3, Hollywood
- Ballymoney Road near Whinney Hill, Hollywood
- Ballymullen Road opposite No.40, Crawfordsburn
- Ballymullen Road at No.6, Crawfordsburn
- Meadow Way at junction near Ballymullan Road, Crawfordsburn
- Burnside Park at No.2 (at wall/Meadow Way), Crawfordsburn
- Meadow Park North at No 11 at mini pillar, Crawfordsburn
- Carolsteen Park at No.1A junction Bridge Road, Helens Bay
- Killaire Avenue opposite S/L No.8 (at fence), Bangor
- Ailsa Park at S/L No.3, Bangor
- Ravelstone Avenue at junction Killaire Park (at wall), Bangor
- Killaire Avenue at No 5, Bangor
- Station Road opposite S/L No.15 (on grass) below No.68 on waste ground, Bangor
- Station View at S/L No.1, Bangor
- Wandsworth Park at junction with Wandsworth Road, Bangor
- Lyndhurst Avenue opposite No.2, Bangor
- Kilieen Avenue at S/L No.9, Bangor
- Innisfayle Drive opposite S/L No.4, Bangor
- Jubilee Drive near S/L No.15, Bangor
- Springhill Heights at No.10, Bangor

- Farm Grove at junction Springhill Avenue, Bangor
- Ballyquinton Gardens at side of No.18 at BT pole, Bangor
- Kilclief Gardens at S/L No.103, Bangor
- Craigboy Mews at telegraph pole, Bangor
- Balligan Gardens at S/L No.122, Bangor
- Birch Park at junction Birch Drive, Bangor
- Clandeboye Way at S/L No.1, Bangor
- Monea Way at S/L No.8 (end of wall), Bangor
- Rostrevor Way at No.12, Bangor
- Clandeboye Way opposite S/L No.6, Bangor
- Rostrevor Drive opposite name plate, Bangor
- Moyne Road, Conlig at junction Vermont Avenue at S/L No.5, Bangor
- Bangor Road, Conlig, at top of Green Road, Conlig
- Meadowvale opposite No.15, Bangor
- Meadowvale Park at S/L No.2, Bangor
- Beechfield junction Main Street, Conlig
- Tower Road/Main Street, Conlig
- Forrest Hill/Main Street, Conlig
- Forrest Hill, Conlig at S/L 10 at side of No. 74
- Westmorland Crescent at side of No.2 (on grass), Bangor
- Westmorland Crescent at S/L No.6, Bangor
- Harehills Drive at junction Westmorland Crescent, Bangor
- Silverstream Crescent at No.61 (in laneway), Bangor
- Silverstream Drive at No.18 (at wall), Bangor
- Silverstream Avenue at No 31, Bangor
- Manor Park/Manor Avenue, Bangor
- Hillcrest Walk outside No 9, Bangor
- Bangor Police Station/Castle Park Avenue, Bangor
- King Street at sign no. 4, Bangor
- Tennyson Avenue at S/L No.1, Bangor
- Princetown Road at Junction of Seacourt Lane, Bangor
- Railwayview Street at No.54, Bangor
- Windsor Gardens at No.2-4, Bangor
- Rugby Avenue opposite No.60, Bangor
- Donard Avenue at No.44 (upper side of BT pole), Bangor
- Donard Avenue at No.25, Bangor
- Maryville Park opposite No.22, Bangor
- Bryansglen West at No.7 (lower side of S/L), Bangor

- Bryansglen Avenue at No.21, Bangor
- Grange Avenue at No.5, Bangor
- Downshire Road at upper side of Maxwell Road at S/L No.14, Bangor
- Downshire Road at lower side of Maxwell Road at S/L 15, Bangor
- Clelland Park South at No.12, Bangor
- Alexandra Gardens at SL 6, Bangor
- Church Avenue at junction Church Drive at wall, Bangor
- Abbey Park at No.49/51, Bangor
- Fairfield Road at junction Dellmont Road side of no. 50, Bangor
- Fairfield Road opposite No.103 on verge, Bangor
- Dellmont Drive at S/L 3 outside No 10, Bangor
- Sunningdale Park at No.7, Bangor
- Glenanne Park opposite Sunningdale Court between hedges, Bangor
- Stanley Road opposite No.9, Bangor
- Seaforth Road opposite S/L No.3, Bangor
- Grove Park at junction Bellevue, Bangor
- Baylands Fourth Avenue at No.4, Bangor
- Beverly Hills at junction Beverly Drive at white wall, Bangor
- Beverly Gardens at junction Beverly Drive opposite No.34, Bangor
- Conniston Drive beside S/L No.2, Bangor
- Chippendale Vale at junction Chippendale Park, Bangor
- Windmill Lane at S/L No.1, Bangor
- Portview/Ballymacconnell Road, Bangor
- Balloo Crescent opposite Howells, Bangor
- Cranley Road opposite No.4, Bangor
- Cranley Grove at S/L No. 4, Bangor
- Cranley Hill at No.2, Bangor
- Irvine Park outside No 38, Bangor
- Hanover Chase at wide footpath, beside No 7 Hanover Court, Bangor
- Beaumont Drive outside No 26, Bangor
- Malvern Heights at S/L No. 28 at bottom of Hill, Bangor
- The Brae junction Ard-Na-Ree, Groomsport
- Springwell Drive beside S/L No.3, Groomsport
- Springwell Drive junction The Brae opposite No.7, Groomsport
- Springwell Crescent at No.58 at BT pole, Groomsport
- Springwell Crescent opposite S/L 4 at rose bed, Groomsport
- The Brae at wall opposite Hillfoot, Groomsport
- Glenganagh Park at S/L No. 3, Groomsport

- Towerview at S/L No.4, Bangor
- Ivyhill Crescent at S/L No. 2, Bangor
- Ballymacormick Park at name plate, Bangor
- Towerview Avenue opposite No.101, Bangor
- Sherwood Road at S/L No.6, Bangor
- Abbey Ring at S/L No. 34, Holywood
- Abbey Ring at S/L No. 12, Holywood
- Ardmillan Park at S/L No 4, Bangor
- Cranley Grove at No 54, Bangor
- Croft Park at No 34, Holywood
- East Link at S/L No. 2, Holywood
- Kinwood Road at No2, Bangor
- Knightsbridge Court at No 15-17, Bangor
- Knockmore Park at SL 12, Bangor
- Princetown Road at No 67, Bangor
- Ranfurly Ave at S/L No. 15, Bangor
- Regency Square at S/L No. 2, Bangor
- Rhanbuoy park at S/L No. 10, Holywood
- Thornleigh Gardens at S/L No.6, Bangor
- West Link at S/L No. 8, Holywood
- Windmill Road at S/L No. 1, Bangor

Road Safety

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline any co-operative ventures he has undertaken or planned with other Departments in relation to road safety.

(AQW 5908/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department is cooperating with the Department of the Environment in taking forward their Road Safety Strategy 2010-2020. Specific areas of the strategy, which are the responsibility of my Department, include the road infrastructure and setting of speed limits. The draft Strategy was approved by the Executive on 25 February 2010 and consultation commenced on 16 March 2010.

My Department also aims to promote and support sustainable transport options for the school journey through the initiative, Travelwise NI Schools. It has been specifically developed for the education sector in consultation with Travelwise partner organisations, including the Department of Education, the Department of the Environment's Road Safety Division, Eco Schools and Sustrans. All Travelwise Schools resources and initiatives include road safety information and advice.

In addition to the Travelwise NI Schools initiative, my Department is committed to installing road safety facilities outside schools as part of the Travelwise Safer Routes to Schools initiative. This typically involves providing flashing school warning signs and enhanced road safety features near schools to advise motorists of the presence of children. This scheme is run in partnership with the Department of Finance and Personnel and the Department of Education which, where appropriate, provides infrastructure improvements within the school grounds.

Residents' Parking Scheme in South Belfast

Dr A McDonnell asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the cost of all consultation exercises carried out by his Department in relation to the implementation of a residents' parking scheme in the South Belfast constituency.

(AQW 5919/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it has carried out two consultation exercises in 2008 and 2009, in relation to the implementation of developed proposals for residents parking schemes in the following areas of Belfast, three of which are within the South Belfast Constituency:

- Barrack Street;
- Brown's Square;
- Donegall Pass;
- Sandy Row; and
- The Markets (East and West).

The consultancy costs associated with these schemes, up to the end of the 2008/09 financial year, are approximately £85,000 and include the design and development of the schemes and the cost of the 2008 consultation exercise with the residents. It is not possible within the Roads Service accounting procedures to identify the exact breakdown of costs by constituency area, or by consultation exercise alone. In addition, Roads Service staff costs are not included in this amount, as they cannot be extracted from the overall Roads Service staff cost figure.

Pothole-related Claims

Mr A McQuillan asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 5694/10, to outline the reason for the disproportionate decrease in the amount of compensation paid between 2008/09 and 2009/10, given that the number of claims reduced by only 9 for the same period.

(AQW 5944/10)

Minister for Regional Development: The reduction in compensation paid is explained by three factors:-

1. The number of claims paid must be distinguished from the number of claims received. Not all claims are successful and successful claims are not always paid in the same year during which they are received.
2. Compensation payments were made to 21 claimants during the financial year 2008/09. Two of these claims were for personal injury and accounted for £9,750.00. The balance of £2,364.02 was paid out for 19 vehicle damage claims.
3. Compensation payments for 2009/10 have been made for 10 vehicle damage claims. There have been no personal injury compensation payments in 2009/10.

Unauthorised Use of Lamp Posts

Mr T Gallagher asked the Minister for Regional Development what guidance his Department has issued to Roads Service Divisional Roads Managers on the unauthorised use of lamp posts and other street furniture for displaying (a) flags; and (b) advertising signs.

(AQW 5960/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service is signed up to the multi-agency Protocol on the Display of Flags in Public Areas. Divisional Roads Managers have been advised to follow this protocol, under which Roads Service will provide support facilities, such as tower wagons, to take down unwanted flags that have been agreed for removal, but not removed by the communities themselves.

With regard to the unauthorised use of lamp posts and other street furniture for displaying advertising signs, guidance for Divisional Roads Managers is contained within Roads Service's Policy and Procedure Guide: Advertisements placed within road boundaries and overlooking Motorways.

A copy of this document has been placed in the Library.

Watermain to the Former Ministry of Defence Housing at Wood Road, Ballykelly

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development what steps NI Water is taking to address the low pressure of the watermain to the former Ministry of Defence housing at Wood Road, Ballykelly. **(AQW 5961/10)**

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 within the former Ministry of Defence estate at Ballykelly. During the next two weeks, NIW will be analysing data from water pressure monitoring equipment installed on the Clooney Road at the point where the estate is connected to the public watermain. The water infrastructure within the estate is unadopted and therefore not the responsibility of NIW.

I have asked Laurence MacKenzie, Chief Executive of NIW to write to you direct when the outcome of the investigation is known.

Money Allocated for Water Works

Mr B McElduff asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the amount of money allocated for (i) water treatment works; (ii) waste water; (iii) clear water; and (iv) waste incinerators for the 2010/11 financial year. **(AQW 6035/10)**

Minister for Regional Development: A budget has not yet been agreed for 2010/11. Hence the amount of money allocated for (i) water treatment works; (ii) waste water; (iii) clear water; and (iv) waste incinerators for the 2010/11 financial year, is still being determined.

Department for Social Development

Nelson Street Site

Ms C Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Social Development (i) if her Department, or the Housing Executive, had any discussions with the company that own the Nelson Street site, and/or their representatives, to discuss the usage of the site for social housing; (ii) if these discussions are still ongoing; and (iii) to outline the nature of these discussions. **(AQW 5536/10)**

Minister for Social Development (Ms M Ritchie): As this matter is currently the subject of a PSNI investigation, I would not want to potentially prejudice the outcome of that investigation by answering this question at this time. I will be happy to revert to the Member with a substantive response at the conclusion of those investigations.

Village Redevelopment Area of South Belfast

Mr J Spratt asked the Minister for Social Development why only 82 properties out of 538 in the Village redevelopment area of south Belfast were internally surveyed, given that the Housing Executive booklet 'Redevelopment General Advice and Guidance' states that 'we will carry out a full survey of all the properties in the area and if more than a third are unfit we will consider redevelopment'. **(AQW 5644/10)**

Minister for Social Development: Over 27% of occupied dwellings within the Village Urban Renewal Area were surveyed internally. In numerical terms 286 out of 1033 occupied dwellings were internally surveyed. The methodology used for the Urban Renewal Assessment is as determined by the Housing (NI) Order 1992, Unfitness – Area Approach and Enforcement Action. The acquisition on vesting is determined by the Housing (NI) Order 1981 Article 46. Neither of these legal processes requires a full house condition survey of each dwelling.

Village Redevelopment Area of South Belfast

Mr J Spratt asked the Minister for Social Development if a full survey was carried out on the 82 properties surveyed in the Village redevelopment area of south Belfast; and how many were unfit for human habitation.

(AQW 5645/10)

Minister for Social Development: Taking account of an internal survey carried out on 286 properties and the 106 blocked up properties, 33% of properties in the Village area were deemed not to meet the fitness standard

Village Redevelopment Area of South Belfast

Mr J Spratt asked the Minister for Social Development if a full survey was carried out on the 204 properties in the Village improvement area of south Belfast; and how many were unfit for human habitation.

(AQW 5646/10)

Minister for Social Development: Taking account of an internal survey carried out on 286 properties and the 106 blocked up properties, 33% of properties in the Village area were deemed not to meet the fitness standard.

Village Urban Renewal Area of South Belfast

Mr J Spratt asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the criteria used to select properties in the Village Urban Renewal area of south Belfast for an internal survey.

(AQW 5647/10)

Minister for Social Development: The 286 occupied properties internally inspected were selected on a random basis.

Village Redevelopment Area of South Belfast

Mr J Spratt asked the Minister for Social Development whether a condition report was carried out on all properties in the Village redevelopment area of south Belfast, prior to them being blocked up.

(AQW 5649/10)

Minister for Social Development: A condition report is not required for vacant properties. All blocked properties were vacant.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development what action she is taking to provide assistance to people who are severely ill in completing Disability Living Allowance renewal forms and periodic enquiry forms.

(AQW 5793/10)

Minister for Social Development: The leaflets and detailed guidance notes issued with Disability Living Allowance (DLA) renewal and periodic enquiry forms provides comprehensive advice on how to complete the form. Information is also included signposting the customer if they want help filling in the claim form or any part of it. Customers can contact a free phone Benefit Enquiry Line staffed by specially

trained advisers. A text phone service is also available for people with speech or hearing difficulties. Last year close to 450 people used this service to obtain help with DLA form completion. Assistance is also available by calling at Social Security and Jobs & Benefits offices, the Benefit Shop in Castle Court and in certain circumstances a home visit can also be arranged. The information accompanying the forms also points out that a customer may wish to ask a friend, relative, a carer or an advice worker to help them.

Nelson Street Site in North Belfast

Ms C Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Social Development if any Housing Executive staff have been suspended pending a PSNI criminal investigation into the Nelson Street Site in North Belfast.

(AQW 5794/10)

Minister for Social Development: No Housing Executive staff have been suspended pending a PSNI criminal investigation into the Nelson Street site in North Belfast.

Community Pedestrian and Cycle Bridge over the River Mourne

Mr P Doherty asked the Minister for Social Development when she will make a decision on the application by Strabane District Council for funding towards the development of the proposed community pedestrian and cycle bridge over the River Mourne.

(AQW 5797/10)

Minister for Social Development: I remain committed to this project and my officials have worked closely with both Department for Regional Development (DRD) and Strabane District Council over recent months, leading to the resolution of a number of outstanding issues.

My Department's economists have advised that they are content with the economic appraisal prepared by Strabane District Council and the appraisal has now been forwarded to the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) for approval.

Further progress is, of course, dependent on the response from DFP and the availability of funding. I will be in a position to take further decisions once these matters are finalised.

St. Patrick's Day 2010

Mr T Burns asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the total expenditure incurred by her Department in relation to the St. Patrick's Day 2010 celebrations in the Holyland area of Belfast; and for a summary of how this money was spent.

(AQW 5801/10)

Minister for Social Development: The Housing Executive incurred costs of £401.57 in relation to the St Patrick's Day 2010 celebrations in the Holyland area of Belfast. This included staff costs of £259.57 for before and after inspections of the streets, alleys and gardens and £142 spent on letters and postage to Landlords.

Discretionary Housing Payment Budget

Mr G Savage asked the Minister for Social Development how much has been earmarked for the Discretionary Housing Payment budget for 2010.

(AQW 5854/10)

Minister for Social Development: I have not yet agreed the budget for the Housing Executive for the incoming financial year and therefore am currently unable to confirm what will be included for the Discretionary Housing Payment budget in 2010/11.

Neighbourhood Renewal Scheme in the Kilcooley Estate, Bangor

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the next stages of the Neighbourhood Renewal scheme in the Kilcooley Estate, Bangor.

(AQW 5870/10)

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 identified in the action plan, with additional funding of £765,509 levered in 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.

Funding to the Voluntary and Community Sector

Ms C Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Social Development (i) to detail the funding allocated by her Department to the voluntary and community sector in the Belfast area in the 2009/10 financial year; and (ii) how much of the funding is used for (a) staff support; and (b) programmes.

(AQW 5909/10)

Minister for Social Development: The funding allocated by my Department to the Voluntary and Community Sector in Belfast for the 2009/10 financial year was £18,138,430.54. Detail of this funding is supplied at Annex A to this response.

Programme / Organisation	Grant Award Amount	Salaries	Running / Programme Costs
Areas at Risk	£ 79,930.00	£ 14,200.00	£ 65,730.00
Community investment Fund	£ 521,856.00	£ 471,555.00	£ 50,301.00
Modernisation Fund	£ 521,856.00	£ 471,555.00	£ 50,301.00
Regional Infrastructure Programme	£ 3,754,579.00	£ 2,786,038.00	£ 968,541.00
Volunteering Bureaux Initiative	£ 289,066.82	£ 214,882.64	£ 74,184.18
Capacity Building Programme	£ 472,525.36	£ 366,010.50	£ 106,514.86
Womens Centres Childcare	£ 392,431.00	£ 346,041.00	£ 46,390.00
Community Volunteering Scheme	£ 328,581.00	£ -	£ 328,581.00
Community Support Programme - Belfast City Council*	£ 1,928,504.00	£ -	£ -
Neighbourhood Renewal *	£ 10,251,180.00	£ -	£ -
Collated Total	£18,540,509.18	£14,670,282.14	£1,670,543.04

* Only Grant Award figures available

Maintenance Strategy

Ms C Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Social Development if her Department is planning to undertake an Equality Impact Assessment on any revisions to its current maintenance strategy.

(AQW 5912/10)

Minister for Social Development: The Housing Executive's maintenance investment strategy is currently under review and will be submitted to my Department for consideration upon completion.

The issue of an equality impact assessment regarding the agreed strategy will be addressed upon completion of the review.

Social Housing Waiting List in South Belfast

Mr A Maskey asked the Minister for Social Development for a breakdown of the social housing waiting list in South Belfast in terms of the size of the property according to the number of bedrooms.

(AQW 5932/10)

Minister for Social Development: The information is not available in the format requested as the waiting list is categorised by household type and not by the size of the property according to the number of bedrooms.

Fuel Poverty Strategy

Mr A McQuillan asked the Minister for Social Development if her Department's objective in the Fuel Poverty Strategy 'to eliminate fuel poverty in vulnerable households' will be delivered by its target date in 2010.

(AQW 5954/10)

Minister for Social Development: It has already been widely acknowledged that the target to eliminate fuel poverty in vulnerable households by 2010 will not be met. Fuel poverty is affected by three factors: income, fuel prices and energy efficiency. Government can have some influence over improving household incomes; however, Government influence on fuel prices is limited as fuel prices are determined largely by world markets. The energy efficiency of houses is the contributor to fuel poverty where Government has greatest potential for making an impact. Since 2001 my Department has spent over £118 million making over 72,000 homes warmer. A new fuel poverty strategy is being developed and will be subject to public consultation in the summer.

Funding Allocation for the Maintenance and Capital Works

Ms C Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Social Development to detail her Department's funding allocation for the Maintenance and Capital Works for the 2010/11 financial year; and for her assessment of the impact of any expenditure reduction on Egan and other local contractors.

(AQW 5957/10)

Minister for Social Development: Due to the downturn in land and house sales there will be a shortfall in the Housing Budget for 2010/11 which will impact on all spending programmes, including the maintenance and capital works programmes. The Housing Executive has not yet been advised of its budget allocations for next year as the Executive have not yet approved the Northern Ireland Block budgets.

Belfast Area Partnership Boards

Ms C Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the future role of the Belfast Area Partnership Boards in the delivery of Neighbourhood Renewal projects.

(AQW 5987/10)

Minister for Social Development: The current contracts for the Belfast Area Partnership Boards cover the period 1 October 2009 – 31 March 2011. In carrying out their functions the Boards work closely with and provide practical assistance on an ongoing basis to Neighbourhood Renewal Partnerships (NRPs) throughout Belfast in taking forward the priority actions identified within neighbourhood action plans under the various regeneration themes.

Under the Review of Public Administration (RPA) urban regeneration operational delivery functions and the delivery of support for the voluntary and community sector at local level will transfer to local Councils with effect from May 2011. The operational implications of the transfer of functions will be the responsibility of the City Council.

Funding for Groundwork NI

Ms C Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Social Development to explain her decision not to continue funding for Groundwork NI from 31 March 2010.

(AQW 5989/10)

Minister for Social Development: I have not taken a decision not to continue funding for Groundwork NI. I am aware that officials are considering a brief extension of the contract which ends on 31 March 2010 after which Groundwork NI will be required to compete for contracts along with others who offer similar services.

Environmental Scheme on the Andersonstown Road

Mr P Maskey asked the Minister for Social Development (i) when the environmental scheme on the Andersonstown Road will begin; (ii) how long it will take to complete; and (iii) how much it will cost.

(AQW 6011/10)

Minister for Social Development: Subject to the availability of funding, the proposed Andersonstown Road Environmental Improvement Scheme is due to commence in the autumn of this year. The scheme will cost in the region of £1.7m and will take up to 16 months to complete.

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Friday 9 April 2010

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Gender Advisory Panel

Mr P Weir asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister which members of the Gender Advisory Panel are representatives of community-based women's groups.

(AQW 5958/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister (Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness): The Gender Advisory Panel includes representatives of women's organisations, representatives of men's organisations, the ECNI, NIC/ICTU and CBI. A number of the groups which have been invited to join the panel are organisations whose members include community-based women's groups. It is estimated that nine members of the Gender Advisory Panel can be said to be representative of community-based women's groups, on the basis of their membership.

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Tyrone - Cavan Interconnector

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if her Department has held any meetings with 'Safe Energy for Armagh and Tyrone' in relation to the proposed Tyrone - Cavan Interconnector; and if she would consider facilitating such a meeting in order to hear residents' concerns.

(AQW 5928/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms M Gildernew): I have been invited to meet representatives of 'Safe Energy for Armagh and Tyrone'. I intend to meet with this group shortly and listen to their concerns

Mullahead Ploughing Festival

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how much funding her Department has given to the Mullahead Ploughing Festival in Gilford in each of the last three years.

(AQW 5991/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: No funding has been requested by or given to the Mullahead Ploughing Festival in each of the last 3 years by my Department. However, the total cost of DARD sponsorship and attendance at agricultural shows and events in the north of Ireland, including the NI International Ploughing Championships, during 2009 was in excess of £75,000.

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

Cultural Ambassador for Ireland

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure if he will meet the new Cultural Ambassador for Ireland to explore how the Ambassador can ensure that Northern Ireland is included in his work of fostering a renewed cultural relationship between Ireland and the USA.

(AQW 5816/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr N McCausland): I understand that the renowned film actor Gabriel Byrne has been appointed as the Cultural Ambassador for Ireland by Brian Cowen, with a remit to work with the Government of the Republic of Ireland and Irish artistic bodies.

While I have no immediate plans to meet with Mr Byrne, I am already working to further develop the existing cultural relationship between Northern Ireland and the United States of America. During March I visited Austin, Texas and in a series of meetings and visits explored with State representatives opportunities for co-operation, exchange and promotion in the fields of culture, heritage, the arts and creative industries.

Bonuses Paid to Non-Civil Servants

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for a breakdown of any bonuses paid in the 2009/10 financial year to persons, other than civil servants, from within the Department's overall budget.

(AQW 5821/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: A breakdown of the bonuses paid from within the Department's overall budget, via the respective Arms Length Bodies, for 2009/10 to non-civil servants is provided in the table below.

Arms Length Body	Total amount of bonuses paid 2009/10
Arts Council of Northern Ireland	£950
National Museums Northern Ireland	£1000.00
Northern Ireland Screen	£15,128.30 *
Sport Northern Ireland	£15,800.00

* This figure represents DCAL's contribution of 55%.

Publicly Funded Museums

Mr G Campbell asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (i) to list all the publicly funded museums; (ii) the number of visitors to each museum in each of the last three years; and (iii) the net cost of each facility in each of these years.

(AQW 5887/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The attached table details the information requested in parts i) and ii) of the question. However it has not been possible to provide a complete answer to the third part of the question as both the NMNI and NIMC do not routinely collect this information in the format required.

Publicly funded museums and the number of visitors to each museum in each of the last three years

	Visitors				Funding		
	2007	2008	2009	Total	2006/7	2007/8	2008/9
Ulster Folk and Transport Museum	168,866	190,580	169,628	529,074	NMNI Totals		
Ulster Museum	N/O	N/O	152,380	152,380	[Figures for individual museums not held]		
Ulster American Folk Park	157,325	152,717	154,471	464,513			
Armagh County	12,685	10,439	12,229	35,353	15594193	15654037	16172537
Andrew Jackson & US Rangers	1,044	725	N/K	1,769			
Ballycastle Museum	4,064	2,820	N/K	6,884			
Ballymoney Museum	6,271	4,301	N/K	10,572			
Carrickfergus Museum	30,767	26,909	N/K	57,676			
Coleraine Museum	2,388	3,558	N/K	5,946			
Craigavon Museum Service – Barn Museum	N/O	650	N/K	650			
Craigavon Museum Service – Waterside House & Heritage Building	750	1,830	N/K	2,580			
Derry Museum Service – Harbour Museum	3,166	4,084	N/K	7,250			
Derry Museum Service – Tower Museum	27,039	25,880	N/K	52,919			

	Visitors				Funding		
	2007	2008	2009	Total	2006/7	2007/8	2008/9
Down County Museum	35,285	34,796	N/K	70,081			
Fermanagh County Museum	40,355	25,739	N/K	66,094			
Inniskillings Museum							
Strabane DC Museum Service	1,717	N/O	N/K	1,717			
Green Lane Museum	8,470	8,640	N/K	17,110			
Irish Linen Centre & Lisburn Museum	51,313	60,507	N/K	111,820			
Larne Museum	1,847	4,744	N/K	6,591			
Mid-Antrim Museum	5,973	18,838	N/K	24,811			
Naughton Gallery at Queen's	14,000	15,000	N/K	29,000			
Newry Museum	28,554	41,933	N/K	70,487			
North Down Museum	47,118	44,098	N/K	91,216			
Police Museum	1,840	2,075	N/K	3,915			
Royal Irish Fusiliers Museum	8,813	9,209	N/K	18,022			
Royal Irish Regimental Museum	N/O	N/O	N/K	0			
Royal Ulster Rifles Museum	1,840	773	N/K	2,613			
Sentry Hill House	5,199	6,400	N/K	11,599			
Somme Heritage Centre	21,854	27,194	N/K	49,048			

Notes:

- 1) 'N/O' means Not Open indicating temporary or permanent closure
- 2) 'N/K' - For 2010 the number of visitors to date for National Museums are shown. For non-national museums, the data for 2009/10 has not yet been received centrally by NI Museums Council.

Fintona Horse-drawn Tram

Mr B McElduff asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure if he will support the request to National Museums Northern Ireland to display the Fintona Horse-drawn Tram, currently housed at the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum, for a week-long period in 2010 in the Ecclesville Centre, Fintona.

(AQW 5904/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I am pleased that National Museums has engaged with the community of Fintona on several occasions in the past. During 1989-1990, staff from the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum liaised with the Fintona Development Association in relation to the rebuilding of the Fintona Baggage Truck through a youth training programme: the truck is now displayed alongside the tram.

National Museums have advised me that they wish to continue such engagement in regard to the Fintona Horse-drawn Tram. However a close examination, carried out with a view to assessing suitability for travel of the tram to Ecclesville Centre, Fintona has highlighted a number of structural weaknesses in its frame. Movement of the tram, even over a short distance, presents a high risk of further damage.

I trust that the care and preservation of this important part of our transport heritage will be accepted as overriding and that alternative approaches between the Ecclesville Centre, Fintona and National Museums can be explored.

Art Work of Conrad Atkinson

Mr B McElduff asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure if he will encourage the Ulster Museum to exhibit the art work of Conrad Atkinson, given that his work is currently included in the Northern Ireland collection of the Wolverhampton Art Gallery.

(AQW 5905/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I can confirm that National Museums has been in dialogue with Professor Conrad Atkinson. At this stage National Museums have no plans to exhibit the work of Conrad Atkinson in the near future. As a matter of course National Museums keeps under review future exhibitions across its sites and will do so in regard to the availability of collections held by other museums and art galleries.

Games Licences and Permits on Lough Erne

Mr T Gallagher asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the revenue generated for his Department from the issue of Games Licences and permits on Lough Erne in each of the last ten years.

(AQW 6017/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Local Game licences and permits for Fermanagh can be issued by any of the Department's permit distributors located throughout Northern Ireland, I am therefore unable to detail the revenue generated for my Department at this time solely for Fermanagh.

The following details the total Local Permits issued for the last ten years for the whole of Northern Ireland.

2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
1252	892	1405	1108	1180	1222	1118	1238	1244	1290

The Department is currently seeking to put in place a system where this information can be obtained.

Department for Employment and Learning

South Eastern Regional College

Mr C McDevitt asked the Minister for Employment and Learning if he is aware that the South Eastern Regional College has employed 'self-employed contractors' to deliver teaching; and to detail the number of 'self-employed contractors' employed.

(AQW 5901/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning (Sir Reg Empey): I am advised that South Eastern Regional College has contracted the services of six individuals, on a self-employed basis, to deliver economically focused courses for local businesses on a full cost recovery basis.

South Eastern Regional College

Mr C McDevitt asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what tendering process the South Eastern Regional College followed when appointing self-employed contractors.

(AQW 5929/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: South Eastern Regional College has assured me that the tendering process applied to procure these services complies fully with the Public Procurement Regulations and my Department's Financial Memorandum with this regard.

All but one of the contracts awarded were for £1500 or less, thus requiring one quotation. The remaining contract was awarded on a single tender basis due to the specialist nature of the provision.

Wind Turbines at the University of Ulster, Coleraine

Mr A McQuillan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning (i) why additional wind turbines are to be located at the Coleraine campus of the University of Ulster to offset CO2 emissions from all campuses including Magee, Jordanstown and Belfast; and (ii) whether any alternative methods of reducing CO2 emissions, such as solar panels, have been considered.

(AQW 5951/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: This question has asked for information that is not held by my Department. The question was referred to the University and it has provided the following information.

(i) The University of Ulster in common with all universities is required to reduce its carbon emissions in order to achieve government targets. The additional wind turbines are not proposed to offset CO2 emissions from other campuses, the purpose is to provide carbon free electricity to match the Coleraine campus load. The existing turbine on the Coleraine campus was the first in a UK University and has produced around 2.5GWh of carbon free electricity and reduced carbon emissions by over 1000 tonnes. The proposed scheme for a further three turbines will provide carbon free electricity for most of the campus' demand and will reduce carbon emissions by a further 2400 tonnes/yr. Statutory consultation will take place as part of the planning process.

(ii) The University has considered alternative methods of reducing carbon emissions. It has deployed low and zero carbon technologies across its campuses including combined heat and power schemes, ground source heat pumps, grey water recovery, naturally ventilated buildings, absorption chilling, enhanced insulation schemes and conversion to gas fuel.

Solar panels are not currently economically viable for electricity generation in Northern Ireland. The University is considering installing solar hot water heating in new developments and has completed feasibility studies which concluded that the technology is not viable for retro fitting to existing University installations.

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Bonuses Paid to Non-Civil Servants

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for a breakdown of any bonuses paid in the 2009/10 financial year to persons, other than civil servants, from within the Department's overall budget.

(AQW 5857/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mrs A Foster): The bonuses paid to non civil servants in the 2009-2010 financial year are as follows:

Invest NI made 6 awards totalling £3,000. The NI Tourist Board made 2 awards totalling £1,000.

Tourism Ireland made 1 award. However, to disclose the amount may enable the individual to be identified and to do so may breach his/her rights under the Data Protection Act.

'Energy from Waste' Projects

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail all financial assistance that Invest NI has given to 'energy from waste' projects or incinerator projects, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 5946/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: A total of £16,108,701 has been offered by Invest NI to support 'energy from waste' or incinerator projects over the past five years. Against these offers £3,416,770 has been paid during the 5 year period. A significant proportion of the assistance has been offered in the past two years and as projects can take between 3 to 5 years to draw down expenditure there is a lag between assistance offered and cash paid. The annual split of offers and payments is detailed in the table below.

Year	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	Total
Assistance Offered £	100,000	854,118	1,525,390	9,178,880	4,450,313	16,108,701
Assistance Paid £	100,000	819,118	1,519,085	144,880	833,687	3,416,770

Department of Finance and Personnel

Disposal of Computers Within the Civil Service

Mr C McDevitt asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel (i) how many computers used by the Civil Service have reached the end of their life cycle in each of the last five years; (ii) how many computers have been disposed of in each Department in each of the last five years; and (iii) who is currently contracted to manage the use and disposal of computers within the Civil Service.

(AQW 5861/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr S Wilson): The following table shows computers replaced by NICS, having reached the end of their life cycle in the last five years, or computers purchased for new staff:

	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
DARD (incl AFBI)	1018	1365	1590	624	450

	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
DEL	0	0	0	0	778
DCAL	65	20	96	18	133
DE	37	144	24	615	145
DETI	234	94	504	12	218
DFP	359	406	243	571	840
DHSSPS	296	110	53	572	219
DOE	213	57	158	294	403
DRD	797	771	652	118	230
DSD	100	134	38	245	374
OFMDFM	72	202	59	107	131
Total	3191	3303	3417	3176	3921

DFP implemented an ICT Shared Service Centre, IT Assist, in April 2007. The responsibilities of this organisation include PC replacement. IT Assist migrated all NI Departments onto the new service from April 2007 – March 2009. Consequently, the information used in this response has been supplemented by information requested from and supplied by other departments.

During the period 2005/06 – 2008/09 DEL's IT hardware was owned and managed, under a PFI contract, by Fujitsu Services Ltd, hence the NIL responses for 2005/06 – 2008/09.

The majority of the staff working in DSD and part of DEL are on the DWP DOI network. Under this contract, which has been in place since 2005/06, all assets are owned by the supplier, currently HPES, and it is their responsibility to re-use, replace or dispose of any kit no longer in use.

The framework contract that is used for PC replacement requires the supplier to dispose of replaced machines in line with Government/EC standards. Consequently, each computer replaced has been appropriately disposed of. Sufficient information is not kept to show the exact numbers of disposals in each financial year but the total number of disposals will be broadly similar to the numbers in the table.

Over the last 3 years BT have been responsible for the provision of Laptop and Desktop computers to the NICS. BT were appointed following secondary competitions which were tendered through the NICS Hardware Frameworks. As part of the hardware contracts awarded BT were required to partner with one of the companies listed on the NICS IT Disposal Contract, who would be responsible for undertaking all of the equipment disposal activities associated with the hardware contracts. BT appointed AMI as their disposal partner for the NICS Laptop and Desktop contracts.

Deaths

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the total number of deaths registered in each of the last 10 years; and how many and what percentage of these deceased persons were (i) buried; and (ii) cremated.

(AQW 5898/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: In 2009 there were 14,413 deaths registered^P. Information on burials and cremations is not held centrally. Information on cremations is held by Belfast City Council. In 2009 there were 2,685 cremations in Roselawn cemetery including a small number of cremations of deceased residents of the Republic of Ireland.

P Provisional data

DARD Clerical Errors

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an explanation of the 'clerical errors which incorrectly reduced DARD's net cash requirement, as stated in Part 2 of the 2009-10 SSEs' as outlined in his letter to Ministerial colleagues dated 18 March 2010; and what measures have been put in place to ensure these errors are not repeated.

(AQW 5941/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: In preparation for the Spring Supplementary Estimates (SSEs), DFP issued departments with draft SSE templates populated with indicative figures to assist them in preparation of their Estimates. During preparation, an indicative figure was placed in an incorrect row.

The error in the draft template was not detected by the Department of Agriculture. DARD used the figurework supplied by DFP to post a reduced cash requirement without verifying its own internal in-year changes. In doing so, DARD did not review or question the misplaced figure, but made compensating adjustments to other associated figures in order to reconcile to an overall total. This was compounded by a second clerical error in the Increase/Decrease in Creditors line. Here, DARD erroneously requested a reduction in the cash requirement which had the result of reducing DARD's overall cash requirement by £90m.

DARD recognises that there has been a failure of its internal control and has taken steps in agreement with DFP to strengthen its internal control procedures in this area. The Department is monitoring and reporting cash draw-downs more strictly. Ahead of the next Estimates cycle, the Department will also strengthen its quality review processes of Estimates returns. Work on this has already begun.

From a DFP perspective, in order to avoid the possibility of any future recurrence of this issue, DFP will no longer populate departmental Estimate templates with indicative figures, but will instead provide supporting information to allow departments to populate the templates themselves.

Staff Grievances by Civil Servants

Mr A McQuillan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to AQW 4516/10, if the 83 outstanding grievances from 2008/09 have now been resolved; and if he is aware of the reasons for the increase in the number of grievances over the two year period.

(AQW 5953/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: Currently, 9 of the 83 outstanding grievance cases from 2008/09 have been resolved.

An individual can raise a grievance about any employment related matter. There is no specific reason as to why the number of grievances has increased over the two year period; however, it has been recognised that disputes that do arise are less likely to be resolved informally than they were before the statutory procedures were put in place.

Cross-border Event to Commemorate the Famine

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel if he has received a bid for funding from either the Minister of Education or the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for a cross-border event to commemorate the Famine in Ireland; and if he plans to approve the request.

(AQW 5964/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: I have not received a bid for funding from either the Minister of Education or the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for a cross-border event to commemorate the Famine in Ireland.

Northern Ireland Water

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to AQW 5790/10 to the Minister for Regional Development, on what basis did his Department approve the payment of bonuses to the Executive Directors of Northern Ireland Water for 2008/09.

(AQW 5994/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: My Department did not approve the payment of any bonuses to the Executive Directors of Northern Ireland Water in respect of 2008-09.

Business Rate

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what is the average business rate in Northern Ireland compared to (i) England; (ii) Scotland; and (iii) Wales.

(AQW 6039/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The average business rate for Northern Ireland which will apply in 2010/11 is 54.33p, based on an average district business rate of 23.64p.

A uniform business rate applies in England, Scotland and Wales. The rate in England and Scotland for 2010/11 is 40.7p for smaller businesses and 41.4p for larger businesses. The two different rates are due to the Small Business Rate Relief Schemes which apply there and are funded by charging ratepayers in larger premises a higher rate.

In Wales, there is a single rate because they fund their small business rate relief through their DEL (as we do in NI), rather than charging other ratepayers more. The Welsh rate in the pound for 2010/2011 is 40.9p.

Business rates in Northern Ireland are not directly comparable with those in England, Scotland and Wales because of the difference in valuation dates. That is, unlike Northern Ireland, non domestic properties in England, Scotland and Wales were revalued in 2010 and are based on 2008 values. Non domestic properties in Northern Ireland were last valued in 2003 and are based on 2001 values.

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Bonuses Paid to Non-Civil Servants

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for a breakdown of any bonuses paid in the 2009/10 financial year to persons, other than civil servants, from within the Department's overall budget.

(AQW 5820/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Mr M McGimpsey): There were no bonuses paid in the 2009/10 financial year to any staff employed in the Health and Social Care or the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service.

Multiple Sclerosis

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if patients diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis are automatically referred to an occupational therapist or social worker.

(AQW 5826/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: No. Patients newly diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis undergo an individual assessment of their needs. Referral to an occupational therapist or social worker is made in line with their specific identified needs.

Multiple Sclerosis

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people are currently diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis; and how this compares with (i) the rest of the UK; and (ii) other European countries.

(AQW 5827/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information on the number of people currently diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis is not available.

Multiple Sclerosis

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety the longest period of time that a patient diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis in the East Antrim constituency has had to wait before seeing a physiotherapist.

(AQW 5828/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Multiple Sclerosis

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety which Health and Social Care Trust area has the highest proportion of people diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis.

(AQW 5830/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information relating to which Health and Social Care Trust area has the highest proportion of people diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis is not available.

Old Belvoir Park Hospital Site

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he plans to sell land at the old Belvoir Park Hospital site; and how much the sale is expected to achieve in monetary value.

(AQW 5833/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I plan to sell the Belvoir Park hospital site at the best value achievable in accordance with statutory requirement. Land and Property Services (LPS) have advised that in order to maximise the value of the site, planning permission for an alternative use should be obtained prior to sale. A planning application for the site was submitted in December 2009 after extensive discussions with Planning Service. The site will be put on the open market for disposal following receipt of the planning determination and subject to advice from LPS on market conditions and disposal strategy.

The sale value will be determined by market demand at the time of sale.

Departments Surplus Land

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if his Department is allowed to keep the money obtained by selling its surplus land; and if this money can be used for revenue purposes.

(AQW 5834/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The approved capital budget for every Northern Ireland Department at the outset of the current CSR period included, where appropriate, an annual figure that was expected to be achieved through the disposal of surplus assets. Failure to achieve the sales target effectively reduces the available budget in that year. In the event that the approved target is exceeded in any given year, the surplus receipts must be surrendered to the NI Block.

The sales target for DHSSPS for the current CSR period was initially £95m. The economic downturn, and the need to ensure that appropriate planning approvals are in place for each disposal site, have rendered this target unachievable, which means that the DHSSPS capital budget has effectively been cut by more than £86m over the 3-year period.

It is not possible to use capital resources for revenue purposes.

Partially Sighted and Blind Patients

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if there is a uniformed process across all the Health and Social Care Trusts concerning making and attending hospital appointments for partially sighted and blind patients.

(AQW 5835/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Each Health and Social Care Trust has their own procedures for communicating hospital appointments in the most accessible and suitable way to meet the individual needs and preferences of patients who are partially sighted and blind.

Safeguarding Boards and Panels for Child Protection

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the potential need for increased expenditure should his Department proceed with the proposed Safeguarding Boards and Panels for child protection.

(AQW 5836/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: An annual recurrent budget of £750,000 has been identified as the amount required for the SBNI to operate effectively and has been secured within the DHSSPS Departmental budget.

Rheumatoid Arthritis

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many children under the age of 16 have been diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis in each of the last five years.

(AQW 5847/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information relating to the number of children under the age of 16 diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis in each of the last 5 years is not available.

Bonuses Paid to Doctors

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, of the £11m bonuses paid to doctors, (i) how many individuals received payments; (ii) what the average payment was; and (iii) how many of these doctors also receive income from the private sector.

(AQW 5852/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The NI Clinical Excellence Awards scheme aims to ensure recognition of exceptional personal contributions made by individual doctors, locally, nationally and internationally, who show a commitment to achieving the delivery of high quality care to patients and to the continuous improvement of Health and Social Care.

A total of 657 consultants in Northern Ireland received payment for an award following the 2008/2009 awards round. Income received from the private sector is a matter for the individual consultant and this information is not held by the Department.

Health Service Computers

Mr C McDevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety who is contracted to manage the computers used by the Health Service; and who is contracted to refurbish and dispose of Health Service computers when they reach the end of their life.

(AQW 5863/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Individual HSC organisations have established local contractual arrangements for the management and refurbishment/disposal of computers. Details of these arrangements and the organisations involved are not retained centrally.

Privately-owned Sun Beds

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans he has, under his proposed legislation, to deal with privately-owned sun beds.

(AQW 5866/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The proposed Bill would make it illegal to sell a sunbed to anyone under 18 years of age.

Care Packages

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the total cost of providing care packages in each of the last three financial years.

(AQW 5869/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The cost of care packages for individuals will vary greatly, and is dictated by each individual's assessed care needs.

Category	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Daycare	£72,875,008	£76,537,304	£79,856,803
Domiciliary care	£157,437,869	£170,698,220	£185,629,659
Nursing Homes care	£209,161,490	£222,956,290	£240,963,015
Residential Homes care	£159,595,483	£167,181,305	£170,808,068
Total	£599,069,850	£637,373,119	£677,257,544

Source: Trust Finance Returns

Provision of Colonoscopy

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he will consider reimbursing patients who have paid to undergo an urgent colonoscopy privately because of delays in provision of the procedure by the Health Service.

(AQW 5880/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: It is for the Health and Social Care Board to decide whether or not patients are reimbursed for costs associated with treatment.

The Board does not ordinarily fund patients who source their own private treatment; however, if any patient wishes to write to the Board citing exceptional circumstances, the Board has undertaken to consider each individual case and respond as soon as possible.

Communication Policy of Hospital Administrators

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he will consider a review of the communication policy between hospital administrators and patients.

(AQW 5881/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: In November 2008 my Department published the document "Improving the Patient and Client Experience" which sets out standards that patients and clients can expect when dealing with health and social care organisations.

The standards relate to respect, attitude, behaviour, communication and privacy and dignity.

I have no plans to review these standards.

Multiple Sclerosis

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) what processes are in place in each Health and Social Care Trust (a) to diagnose Multiple Sclerosis (MS); (b) to set out programmes of support and monitor the changing needs of patients with MS on an ongoing basis; and (ii) what support is given to the emotional and physical needs of patients diagnosed with MS as their condition evolves.

(AQW 5884/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The patient's General Practitioner will play a critical role in respect of identifying early symptoms of Multiple Sclerosis which may require a full neurological assessment by a consultant neurologist.

Once a patient is diagnosed they will remain under the care of the consultant, an MS specialist nurse and their GP. Programmes of support and the monitoring of both emotional and physical needs, will depend on the patient's clinical condition as it evolves. MS nurse contact will continue to support the patient according to their individual needs and wishes. This process is in place across all our Health Care Trusts.

Following a diagnosis with MS, patients have access to the full range of core community health and social care services across Northern Ireland 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 care, including specialist respite care.

Multiple Sclerosis

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) to detail the number of patients currently diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis (MS) in each Health and Social Care Trust area; (ii) what research is currently being carried out into the needs of MS sufferers; (iii) how the approach of the Health Service compares to other parts of the UK, particularly Scotland; and (iv) if he is aware that we have one of the highest incidences of the condition in the world.

(AQW 5886/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information on the number of people currently diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis in Northern Ireland is not available.

My Department is currently undertaking a scoping exercise of nurses and AHPs working with patients with neurological conditions, aimed at developing proposals for a more innovative approach to meeting the needs of patients across Northern Ireland.

In addition, in 2002, my Department carried out a Review of Adult Neurology Services, and the Health and Social Care Board has been tasked with carrying 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 parallel with this work, 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.

Western Urgent Care Base

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the closure of the Western Urgent Care Base in Limavady between the hours of midnight to 8.30am from 1 July 2010; and the resulting impact on the quality of health care provision for Limavady during these hours.

(AQW 5888/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: There is no plan to close the Western Urgent Care Base in Limavady between the hours of midnight to 8.30 am from 1 July 2010.

Neuro-therapists

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is the estimated cost to his Department of employing an additional 15 neuro-therapists.

(AQW 5889/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The employment of staff is the responsibility of HSC Trusts.

It is probable that any additional staff would initially be paid at Band 5, Agenda for Change rates. This results in an estimated cost in the region of £310,650 - £402,585, at current rates.

Through time, it is likely that more experienced members of staff in this specialism could be paid at Band 6 or 7 (£24,381- £39,273).

Media Campaign

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why his Department recently launched a comprehensive media campaign urging young people to abstain from sexual intercourse.

(AQW 5891/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Sexual Health Promotion Strategy and Action Plan 2008-2013 identifies young people as a priority group as they are particularly at risk from increasing rates of sexually transmitted infections, with highest rates of infections amongst the 20-24 years age group. Unplanned teenage pregnancy and early parenthood is associated with poor educational achievement, poor physical and mental health, social isolation and poverty. Evidence shows that young people who report an earlier age of first sexual intercourse are more likely not to have used contraception or protection against sexually transmitted infections.

The recent media campaign "Sex. Don't just do it, think it through" supports a key objective in the Sexual Health Promotion Strategy to enable young people to make informed choices before engaging in sexual activity, especially seeking to empower them to delay first intercourse until an appropriate time of their choosing.

Media Campaign

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) to detail the total cost of the recent media campaign urging young people to abstain from sexual intercourse; and (ii) for a breakdown of money spent on each individual strand of the campaign.

(AQW 5893/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The cost of the recent campaign is as follows:

- (i) the total cost is estimated at £116,862. The campaign is not due to end until 31st March and final confirmation of production costs will not be available until after that date;
- (ii) the cost is broken down as follows:

Strategy development	Creative development	Outdoor advertising costs	Radio advertising costs	Online advertising costs	Production costs	Radio repeat costs
£925	£2,789	£59,850	£17,630	£18,795	£15,213	£1,660

Media Campaign

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what assessment has been made of the effectiveness of current and past media campaigns which urge young people to abstain from sexual intercourse.

(AQW 5895/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The 'Sex. Don't just do it. Think it through' public information campaign was the first campaign in Northern Ireland to empower young people to delay first sexual intercourse. It was evaluated by means of a representative survey of the target group (16 to 25 year olds) in February 2009 in terms of impact on behaviour and attitudes among the target group. It found that most of the target group exposed to the campaign have taken time to at least think or discuss their sexual health. A greater impact appears to have been with the youngest respondents aged 16-19.

Domestic Violence

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for a summary of any data that his Department holds on domestic violence in same-sex relationships.

(AQW 5896/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: No robust data on domestic violence in same-sex relationships is available at present.

Voluntary and Community Sector

Ms C Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) to detail the funding allocated by his Department to the voluntary and community sector in the Belfast area in the 2009/10 financial year; and (ii) how much of the funding is used for (a) staff support; and (b) programmes.

(AQW 5911/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:

- (i) The Government funder's database sets out all funding to voluntary and community organisations by Government Departments. This can be accessed by using the following link: www.volcomgrantsni.gov.uk
- (ii) Information detailing the amount of funding used for (a) staff support; and (b) programmes is not held by the Department and it would take a disproportionate amount of time to collate this information.

Tyrone - Cavan Interconnector

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if his Department has held any meetings with 'Safe Energy for Armagh and Tyrone' in relation to the proposed Tyrone - Cavan Interconnector; and if he would consider facilitating such a meeting in order to hear residents' concerns.

(AQW 5927/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department has not held any meetings with 'Safe Energy for Armagh and Tyrone'. I understand that the Environmental Statement that accompanies the planning application for the proposed Tyrone - Cavan Interconnector, seeks to address health issues and that the relevant public health bodies, in this case the Public Health Agency and the Environmental Health Departments of a number of District Councils, have been consulted. It would be inappropriate to meet while this consultation process is ongoing.

Deer Poaching

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in light of the increase in deer poaching, what measures are in place to ensure that retailers are supplied only with appropriately farmed and approved venison.

(AQW 5930/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: District Councils in Northern Ireland regularly inspect retailers in their District on the basis of risk to ensure compliance with Food Law including the requirements for the traceability of food placed on the market. All estates and hunters supplying retailers with game must comply with this requirement by providing information to the retailer to identify the source of the game. Retailers are required to provide this information to District Councils on demand.

District Councils are obliged to take the appropriate enforcement action if retailers are found to be breach of Food Law.

Caesarean Section

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many babies have been delivered by caesarean section in each of the last five years.

(AQW 5949/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The number of babies that have been delivered by caesarean section in Northern Ireland in each of the last five years, for which information is available, is given in the below table:

Financial Year	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Number of babies delivered by Caesarean Section (Elective and Emergency)	6,290	6,575	6,846	7,355	7,797

Source: Child Health System.

The Child Health System is a live system which is being continuously updated. As a result information provided in this table may not agree with figures presented previously.

Department for Regional Development

Potholes

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he has allocated additional funding to the Roads Service section offices in (i) Newry; and (ii) Downpatrick to assist them in addressing the pothole problems on classified and unclassified roads in the South Down constituency.

(AQW 5917/10)

Minister for Regional Development (Mr C Murphy): My Department's Roads Service has advised that, since the beginning of January 2010, the Newry and Down Section Offices have both received additional funding for the repair and resurfacing of public roads. This money has allowed pre-

determined programmes of work to be carried out in these areas, targeting the worst roads, and has also been used to deal with the effects of the recent cold spell.

‘E’ Procurement System

Mr A McQuillan asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 5296/10, for his assessment of whether the improved controls in relation to procurement activity have been realised through the ‘E’ procurement system.

(AQW 5940/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that the expected improvement controls in relation to procurement activity have been realised through the eOrdering system and associated business process changes. All purchase order requests not related to a contract are now monitored centrally for compliance with NIW’s internal purchasing and financial delegations policies. In addition, all expenditure on operational contracts and management consultants is now monitored to ensure they do not exceed the approved contract or business case value.

Staff Grievances by Civil Servants

Mr A McQuillan asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the number of grievances or dignity at work cases lodged by (i) industrial staff; and (ii) non-industrial staff within his Department in (a) 2007/08; (b) 2008/09; and (c) the current financial year to date.

(AQW 5959/10)

Minister for Regional Development: The information requested is set out in the table below. In the absence of a central database, figures for 2007/08 can only be provided from October 2007, when HRConnect was introduced.

	October 2007 – March 2008		2008/09		2009/10	
	Number of cases lodged by staff		Number of cases lodged by staff		Number of cases lodged by staff	
	Industrial	Non- Industrial	Industrial	Non- Industrial	Industrial	Non- Industrial
Grievances	1	9	11	12	11	17
Dignity at Work	1	1	8	6	7	3
Total	2	10	19	18	18	20

Rathgael Road, Bangor

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development what consideration Roads Service has given to postponing its work on the Rathgael Road, Bangor until NI Water completes work on the Bryansburn Road.

(AQW 5967/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department’s Roads Service has advised that the present closure of the Bryansburn Road, Bangor is to facilitate the installation of a new water main and storm line by NI Water.

The Rathgael Road, Bangor was closed to facilitate essential drainage maintenance and structural strengthening by Roads Service and the road was re-opened on 30 March 2010.

The closure of both roads was approved by Roads Service in order to allow essential works to be carried out to the infrastructure, and appropriate diversionary signs were put in place to assist road users.

Scheduling of Capital Works

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail what discussions are undertaken between Roads Service and NI Water on the scheduling of capital works in any area.

(AQW 5970/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I can advise the Member that, as indicated in my answer to his earlier question, AQW 5874/10, on the same issue, consultation between my Department's Roads Service and Northern Ireland Water on the scheduling of both capital and maintenance works takes place in accordance with the Code of Practice for the Co-ordination of Street Works and Works for Road Purposes and Related Matter.

Capital Projects in Bangor

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) why Roads Service and NI Water are simultaneously working on capital projects on two arterial routes in Bangor; and (ii) what action his Department is taking to address the consequential traffic problems.

(AQW 5973/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the closure of the Bryansburn Road, Bangor is to facilitate the installation of new water main and storm line by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) and the closure of the Rathgael Road, Bangor is to facilitate essential drainage maintenance and structural strengthening by Roads Service.

Both schemes commenced on the 22 March 2010. The closure of both roads was approved by Roads Service, to allow essential work to be carried out on the infrastructure safely and quickly, and appropriate diversionary signs were put in place to assist road users.

Both these schemes are part of the Department's ongoing investment in the roads/water infrastructure within the North Down Borough. The timing of the NIW scheme was to allow occupancy of the newly constructed apartments, and the work being undertaken by Roads Service was to facilitate completion of its 2009/10 works programme.

It was recognised that the simultaneous closure of the Rathgael Road and Bryansburn Road, was causing traffic delays and increasing commuting time between Bangor and Belfast. Roads Service duly responded to this situation and introduced a one-way system on the Rathgael Road for Bangor bound traffic, operating from 16.00 hours on a daily basis which enabled evening peak traffic to move more freely.

I am pleased to confirm that the Rathgael Road was re-opened on 30 March 2010.

NI Water

Mr G Savage asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 5689/10, to define the term 'fees'; and to detail the average daily fee and hours worked per (i) day; (ii) week; and (iii) month by each of the four former NI Water Board Members for the entirety of their time at NI Water.

(AQW 6000/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that its four former Board members were not employees of NIW on paid salaries but received a fee for their services on the days they attended. The average daily fee during their time with NIW was £866 for the Chairman and £750 for each of the three Non-Executive Directors.

As the former Board members were paid on the basis of days attended, NIW does not hold records of the hours they worked in the categories requested and is therefore unable to provide the breakdown sought. The table below details the days attended per annum.

	Days Attended		
	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
Chairman	78.5	*	44.5
Non-Executive Director	35	33	27
Non-Executive Director	40.5	32	27
Non-Executive Director	**	16	29

* Not available as the Chairman also undertook the role of Acting Chief Executive from 1 June 2008 to 26 July 2009.

** Not appointed until July 2008.

Building Developers

Mr R Beggs asked the Minister for Regional Development to list the building developers who have been served with Article 11 procedures to complete development roads in the East Antrim constituency, in each of the last two years; and to include details of the roads concerned.

(AQW 6009/10)

Minister for Regional Development: Details of the developers who have been served Article 11 notices in 2008 and 2009, and the relevant roads in the East Antrim constituency are provided in the table below:

Developer	Site	Year of Issue
B.Crowe and Sons Ltd.	Greenwood Park, Carrickfergus	2008
Ikon Developments Ltd.	Prospect Loanen, Carrickfergus	2008
Astondoa Group Ltd.	Edenmore Court, Jordanstown	2008
Morrisons Homes Ltd.	Rodgers Quay/Maritime Area, Carrickfergus	2009
Claredale Developments.	North Lodge, Prince Andrew Way, Carrickfergus	2009
W&R Moore Ltd.	Woodburn Road (No. 77), Carrickfergus	2009
Taggart Holdings Ltd.	Forthill, Ballycarry	2009

Potholes

Mr T Lunn asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the extent of Roads Service's liability for claims for damage to vehicles or injury to persons caused by potholes.

(AQW 6015/10)

Minister for Regional Development: Roads Service compensation claims are handled by Central Claims Unit, the Department for Regional Development in-house legal unit. Compensation claims are only settled if there is a failure to properly conduct inspection and repair procedures in accordance with Article 8 of the Roads (Northern Ireland) Order 1993. Current maintenance procedures are set out in the 27 March 2009 Road Maintenance Standards for Safety.

Abbot Drive, Newtownards

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 5333/10, to confirm whether any claims have been submitted, but not yet processed by the Roads Service, in relation to the

damage to vehicles due to the poor condition of Abbot Drive, Bowtown Estate, Newtownards, in each of the last 6 months.

(AQW 6023/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I can confirm, in line with my earlier answer to AQW 5333/10, that no claims had been submitted, not yet processed or otherwise, in each of the last 6 months up to the tabling of this Question. I can add however, that an e-mail request about how to make a claim and relating to Abbot Drive, Newtownards, was received in the Department of the Environment's Private Office at 20.18 on Friday 26 March 2010. That message was passed to the Department for Regional Development's Central Claims Unit. That Unit, which is an internal legal unit, deals with all public liability compensation claims against the Department, which includes Roads Service. The Unit replied by e-mail at 11.00 on Monday 29 March 2010. A completed claim form is awaited.

Department for Social Development

Fuel Poverty Strategy

Mr A McQuillan asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the review of the Fuel Poverty Strategy and any public consultation initiated on the strategy.

(AQW 5955/10)

Minister for Social Development (Ms M Ritchie): My officials are in the final stages of drafting a fuel poverty strategy which will be presented to the Inter Departmental Group on Fuel Poverty, the Fuel Poverty Advisory Group and the Social Development Committee prior to a public consultation exercise which will last 12 weeks. I expect the public consultation exercise to commence in June 2010.

Housing in North Belfast

Ms C Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Social Development (i) to detail the private developers or development companies that her Department or the Housing Executive have met with in relation to housing in North Belfast since May 2007; (ii) to outline the nature of these discussions; and (iii) the geographical areas of North Belfast to which the discussions related.

(AQW 5956/10)

Minister for Social Development: One of the main components of the North Belfast Housing Strategy is to increase housing supply and specifically to "work with developers to promote a doubling of new private housing output in North Belfast".

In this context officials from the Department and more often the Housing Executive meet regularly with private developers and development companies to discuss a range of issues that would help take forward that strategy.

Discussions have focussed on the acquisition of homes or land for social housing, land issues, the sale of Housing Executive land, social housing need and general housing market activity.

Many of these meetings often take place around the margins of other meetings and the information would simply not exist to provide an exhaustive list or schedule and what precisely was discussed.

Northern Ireland Assembly Commission

Assembly Library

Mr G Savage asked the Assembly Commission for a breakdown of all costs of the Assembly library in each of the last three years.

(AQW 5850/10)

The Representative of the Assembly Commission (Mr S Moutray): The Assembly does not have a library function as understood in the conventional sense. The Assembly does have a Research and Library Service to support the work of Assembly Members and Committees by providing access to a wide range of information and research services, and to deliver these services using the professional skills of a team of qualified librarians and researchers. Consequently whilst the Assembly Library does have a stock of books, the lending of books to Members is not a core service - rather books and other electronic resources are purchased as potential future sources of information. The costs associated with providing the Library Service are attached.

Library			
	2008	2009	2010
	Expenditure	Expenditure	Expenditure
Secretariat Staffing	311587.06	344,337.20	394,214.54
Secretariat Staff T&S	1105.15	3,527.17	10,782
Training and Development	0	0.00	3,080.00
Staff Support	0	17.00	37.00
Core Services	761.09	0.00	65,916.31
IT Support	1498	1,248.00	1,575.00
Publication & Information	188863.35	239,764.00	214,372.31
Utilities	483	0.00	0.00
Consultancy	0	9,416.61	0.00
General Business Expenditure	0	0.00	102.04
Expenditure Total	504,297.65	598,309.98	690,079.63

Assembly Library

Mr G Savage asked the Assembly Commission who owns the Assembly library and who is responsible for its budget.

(AQW 5851/10)

The Representative of the Assembly Commission (Mr S Moutray): The Northern Ireland Assembly Commission owns the Assembly Library and the Head of the Research & Library Service is the Budget Holder, reporting to the Assembly's Director of Engagement.

Assembly Library

Mr G Savage asked the Assembly Commission to outline the relationship between the Assembly library and other Libraries NI, including any associated costs.

(AQW 5853/10)

The Representative of the Assembly Commission (Mr S Moutray): The Assembly library has no formal relationship with the public library network known as 'Libraries NI'. However the Assembly Library has recently subscribed to the LISC 'Inspire' passport project which allows for members of the public to consult material held in the Assembly Library, business requirements permitting. LISC membership cost is £300 per annum.

Also the Assembly library continues to support an informal arrangement to supply material to the Northern Ireland Publications Resource (NIPR) scheme, which provides access to Government publications through Belfast Central Library.

Assembly Library

Mr G Savage asked the Assembly Commission to detail (i) the number of books lent out by the Assembly library; and (ii) the total cost to the Assembly library of lending books, in each of the last three years.
(AQW 5855/10)

The Representative of the Assembly Commission (Mr S Moutray): As per the answer to question AQW 5850/10 the Assembly provides a wide range of information and research services. The lending of books is not a core service and consequently the Assembly does not monitor the cost of lending a book.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 16 April 2010

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Infrastructure Projects

Mr S Hamilton asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to list all infrastructure projects that have been (i) started; and (ii) completed under the auspices of the investment strategy for Northern Ireland, including their monetary values, broken down by each parliamentary constituency, since May 2007.
(AQW 5236/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister (Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness): The information you have requested has been placed in the Assembly Library.

Executive Meetings

Mr D McKay asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what consideration they have given to holding Executive meetings (i) outside the Stormont Estate; and (ii) and in other constituencies including west of the Bann, following the example of the Scottish Government.
(AQW 5246/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: Arrangements for Executive meetings, including potential venues, are kept under review and do not preclude meetings at locations outside Belfast. Although we have no specific plans for such a meeting yet, we are actively considering the matter at present.

Parades Working Group

Mr D Kennedy asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) how many (a) civil servants; and (b) others have been appointed to assist the Parades Working Group; and (ii) if remuneration was provided to persons other than civil servants assisting the group.
(AQW 5603/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: One OFMDFM official has been providing administrative support to the Working Group on Parades.

The members of the Working Group also received advice from a number of other individuals, as required. No-one received remuneration for the provision of such advice to the Group.

Cross-border Event

Mr G Savage asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister if Executive approval is required by a Minister to fund a cross-border event; and to outline the process to obtain Executive approval.
(AQW 5969/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: The categories of matter which a Minister has a duty to bring to the attention of the Executive for its consideration are set out in Section 2.4 of the Ministerial Code.

Parades Working Group

Mr D Kennedy asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) when they intend to answer AQW 5603/10; (ii) for their assessment of whether the delay is acceptable; and (ii) to give reasons for the delay.
(AQW 6106/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: We refer to our response of 13 April to AQW 5603/10.

Military Sites

Mr A Maskey asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister when the military sites, promised as part of the financial package for policing and justice, will be handed over to the Executive.
(AQO 1008/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: No date has been agreed for the transfer of the four additional sites. Discussions are ongoing between OFMDFM, NIO and MoD officials regarding operational aspects of the transfer. This will not however delay the important preparatory and design work for the education campus at the Omagh sites.

Cohesion, Sharing and Integration Strategy

Mr T Burns asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether the proposed Cohesion, Sharing and Integration strategy is now in final draft, when it will be published and the timeline for its completion.
(AQO 1011/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: Improving relationships between and within communities here and building a shared and better future is a high priority for OFMDFM and the Executive and the careful development of the new good relations programme reflects this.

We recently agreed the core of the programme for Cohesion Sharing and Integration. Officials have circulated a draft copy of the document to devolved departments and the NIO for the input of policies, programmes and activities that will begin to construct the cross-cutting elements of the programme.

Once departments have replied, the draft programme will again be referred to the Assembly Committee and will be issued to the Executive for final clearance.

The programme will then be the subject of a full public consultation which will provide an opportunity for all stakeholder groups to comment and contribute to its development.

The public consultation is likely to begin after the general election and continue until the end of September.

Given the nature of the issues being addressed and the wider constituency involved we hope and expect the consultation to produce many interesting and considered outcomes that will contribute to our overarching policy of achieving 'a peaceful, fair and prosperous society here with respect for the rule of law'.

Once the responses to the consultation have been collated they will be taken on board within the context of a revised text as appropriate.

The redrafted programme will again be referred to the Assembly Committee and the Executive for final clearance.

It is anticipated that the final agreed programme for Cohesion Sharing and Integration will be published before the end of the year.

Fair Employment and Treatment Legislation

Mr M Storey asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what discussions they have had with the Department of Education regarding the review of the exemption for teachers from the Fair Employment and Treatment legislation.

(AQO 1012/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: We have not had any discussions regarding the review of the exception for teachers from the Fair Employment and Treatment legislation.

Maze Site

Rt Hon J Donaldson asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what progress has been made in relation to the development of the Maze Regeneration site.

(AQO 1013/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: We refer the Member to the answer we provided to AQO 676/10 on 8 February 2010..

In addition, the major demolition work on the Maze/Long Kesh site has been completed, and a further £2 million phase of the remediation programme has recently commenced. This contract has been awarded and work has already begun on site.

The Programme Delivery Unit continues to undertake preparatory work and scoping studies, oversee the site maintenance programme and liaise with key stakeholders including representatives from Lisburn City Council and the Blaris redevelopment programme in order to prepare the site for any future development.

Executive Office, Brussels

Mr S Neeson asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether they will consider increasing the resource budget for the Executive's office in Brussels.

(AQO 1014/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: The Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister has invested considerable resources in the Office of the Northern Ireland Executive in Brussels (ONIEB) as a resource for Executive and wider Civic Society since 2001.

The OFMDFM Assembly Committee's recent report on its Inquiry into Consideration of European Issues included a recommendation to carry out a review of the work and funding of the Brussels Office. We intend to accept this recommendation and to expand the review to cover OFMDFM's entire European Division, which is comprised of ONIEB and European Policy and Co-ordination Unit based in Belfast.

While we would not want to pre-empt the findings of the review, any recommendations must take account of the current budgetary constraints.

You will be aware that ONIEB has recently moved to new premises. These were specifically designed to accommodate other organisations on a temporary or permanent basis. DARD and DETI both fund an ongoing permanent representation in the ONIEB premises and there remains the opportunity for other Departments or organisations who wish to commit resources to European engagement to share space in ONIEB.

Financial Assistance Act (Northern Ireland) 2009

Mr W Irwin asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the purposes for which the Financial Assistance Act has been used to date.

(AQO 1016/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: The Financial Assistance Act (NI) 2009 provides a firm statutory basis for the Executive to respond to exceptional circumstances by enabling it to provide financial

assistance to prevent, control or mitigate any aspect or affect of those circumstances. It also provides a statutory basis for the Executive to make available financial assistance to tackle poverty, social exclusion or deprivation when existing funding arrangements are considered ineffective, inadequate or unsatisfactory.

To date, the enabling powers under the Financial Assistance Act have been used only once. In February 2009, we made a determination under section 1(1) of the Act that exceptional circumstances existed as a result of the impact of increased household energy costs and accordingly designated the Department for Social Development to bring forward a Household Fuel Payment Scheme. The Scheme provided the legal basis to authorise a one-off payment of £150 to approximately 150,000 low income households to help the most vulnerable people in society pay their energy bills.

Good Relations

Mr G Robinson asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what steps are required before the Good Relations programme will be fully functional.

(AQO 1017/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: We agreed the core of the programme for Cohesion Sharing and Integration on 23rd February 2010. Officials have circulated a draft copy of the document to devolved departments and the NIO for the input of policies, programmes and activities that will begin to construct the cross-cutting elements of the programme. Once departments have replied, the draft programme will again be referred to the Assembly Committee and will be issued to the Executive for final clearance.

The programme will then be the subject of a full public consultation which will provide an opportunity for all stakeholder groups to comment and contribute to its development. The public consultation is likely to begin after the general election and continue until the end of September.

Once the responses to the consultation have been collated, they will be taken on board within the context of a revised text as appropriate. The redrafted programme will again be referred to the Assembly Committee and the Executive for final clearance.

It is anticipated that the final agreed programme for Cohesion Sharing and Integration will be published before the end of the year.

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Assistance to Farmers

Mr G Campbell asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what assistance her Department can provide to farmers in the Dungiven, Limavady and Coleraine areas who lost large numbers of sheep in the harsh weather conditions and heavy snowfall of 30 and 31 March 2010.

(AQW 6084/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms M Gildernew): I am fully aware of the impact the recent severe weather has had on the north and I sympathise with farmers who are understandably distressed.

The Department has issued practical advice to help minimise losses particularly in regard to ewes with young lambs. Sheep farmers seeking practical advice to minimise losses as a result of the poor weather should contact their local DARD Development Adviser.

There are currently no financial support measures available for farmers' losses due to the severe weather, and my Department is currently facing significant financial resource pressures, across the board. However, with Executive Colleagues' approval I recently met with the DFP Minister to discuss hardship funding in respect of crops damaged by severe weather in January 2010. During the course of the meeting I outlined the initial outcome of the recent crop damage assessment exercise, based on

grower figures, which estimated losses to be in the order of £2.3 million. I also raised the difficulties facing sheep farmers. We had a discussion on the problems faced by these farmers and how these might be addressed and I will bring this matter to the attention of the Executive.

Department of Education

Funding Levels for Schools

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail the level of funding, per pupil, by her Department in 2009/10; and (ii) the projected level of funding in 2010/11 for (a) primary school pupils; and (c) preparatory school pupils.

(AQW 4944/10)

Minister of Education (Ms C Ruane): Faoi shocruithe na Foirmle Coitinn Maoinithe, ba é meánmhaoiniú an dalta i mbunscoil agus i scoil ullmhúcháin sa bhliain 2009/10 ná £2,911 agus £808 faoi seach.

Under the Common Funding Formula arrangements, the average funding per pupil in a primary school and a preparatory school in 2009/10 was £2,911 and £808 respectively.

In addition to the funding provided by my Department, parents are currently expected to pay significant fees to preparatory departments to enable their children to attend those schools. In 2008/09, the average fees charged by preparatory departments amounted to almost £2,700 per child. This requirement means that many parents who cannot afford to pay this fee do not have the choice to send their child to a preparatory department.

The information in relation to the amount of funding to be provided to schools for 2010/11 financial year is not yet available.

Interim Education and Library Boards

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Education for an update on the appointments to the Interim Education and Library Boards.

(AQW 6037/10)

Minister of Education: Cuireadh na próisis chun ionadaithe na nAistritheoirí, ionadaithe an Iontaobhais agus baill ghinearálta a cheapadh chun críche, lena n-áirítear múinteoirí, faoi réir na seiceálacha riachtanacha réamhcheapacháin sula ndearbhaítear ceapacháin go foirmeálta. Tá na próisis le haghaidh bhaill na Comhairle Ceantair ar siúl go fóill.

The appointment processes for the Transferor and Trustee representatives and general members, including teachers, have been completed, subject to the necessary pre-appointment checks being made before appointments are formally confirmed. The processes for District Councillor members are continuing.

Irish-medium Primary Schools

Mr J Wells asked the Minister of Education how many Irish-medium primary schools use the following textbooks for teaching children (i) 'Nothing But an Unfinished Song'; and (ii) 'I Arose This Morning'.

(AQW 6043/10)

Minister of Education: My Department does not collect information on resources that schools use to deliver the curriculum.

Tugann an curaclam athbhreithnithe, rud atá i bhfeidhm i ngach scoil dheontaschúnta anseo le haghaidh gach eochairchéime, solúbthacht do mhúinteoirí agus do scoileanna chun an curaclam a sholáthar ar an bhealach is fearr a bhaineann riachtanais na ndaltaí amach sa seomra ranga. Ceadaíonn sé seo do mhúinteoirí a mbreithiúnas gairmiúil a úsáid le cinneadh a dhéanamh ar acmhainní, ar ábhair agus ar théacsleabhair a úsáideann siad chun an curaclam a sholáthar agus le hiad seo a mhaoiniú ó bhuiséid tharmilgthe a scoileanna.

The revised curriculum, which is in all grant aided schools here for all Key Stages, gives teachers and schools the flexibility to deliver the curriculum in the best way that meets the needs of the pupils in their classroom. This allows teachers to use their professional judgement to decide what resources, materials and text books they use to deliver the curriculum and to fund these from their schools delegated budgets.

Resources for Young People with Visual Impairments

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Education why finance is being invested in resources for young people with visual impairments in the former Castle High School, Belfast when Jordanstown Schools for Children with Auditory or Visual Impairments already provide this service.

(AQW 6063/10)

Minister of Education: Tar éis seoladh an doiciméid feachtais de chuid RNIB dar teideal “Cá bhfuil mo leabhar?”, fuair tionscadal (LA) de chuid na Roinne Oideachais amach go raibh deacracht, go háirithe ag leibhéal iarbhunscoile, ag daltaí a bhfuil lagú amhairc (LA) acu teacht ar théacsleabhair agus ar ábhair staidéir ag an am céanna agus a bhí ag a bpiaraí.

Following the launch of the RNIB campaign document “Where’s my book?”, a Department of Education (DE) scoping project (VI) established that pupils with a visual impairment (VI) experienced difficulty, especially at post-primary level, in accessing textbooks and study materials at the same time as their peers.

As special educational provision is the responsibility of the Education and Library Boards (ELBs), the 5-Board Regional Strategy Group for Special Educational Needs (RSG), at the request of DE, established a working group to promote a consistent approach to service delivery across all Boards.

The group consulted with the voluntary and statutory sectors, including Jordanstown Schools, parents and children, to provide a consensus view that, within an overall strategy of achieving full educational inclusion and improving levels of educational attainment amongst children and young people with VI, a centralised resource base should be established. Furthermore, the consultation exercise established that the geographical location of the resource base was of secondary importance to its capacity to carry out the core functions and meet the specified criteria.

RSG requested ELBs to submit proposals for a suitable location. Two proposals were received – the former Castle High School, Belfast and the former Hilden Primary School, Lisburn. The merits of the two proposals were considered by RSG in terms of their capacity to meet agreed criteria and core functions for the resource base, taking into consideration the best use of available funds and the location’s capacity to attract appropriately qualified staff with the required expertise.

Castle High School, Belfast was identified by RSG as a suitable location. No proposal was received by RSG identifying Jordanstown Schools as a potential location.

The working group also identified the resources required to carry out the functions of a centralised resource base, including recurrent and set-up costs, and a bid was submitted to the Department for the necessary funding.

As statutory responsibility for securing provision for pupils with special educational needs (SEN) rests with the five ELBs, the Department allocated the capital funding to the Belfast Education and Library Board (BELB), on behalf of all 5 Boards, in the 2009/10 financial year on the understanding that no guarantee could be given regarding additional funding to meet recurrent costs.

The expertise of the staff in the Jordanstown Schools is very much valued. I understand that the Chair of the RSG sub-group has contacted the Principal, who has attended a meeting of the sub-group, about the operational aspects of the centralised resource and the determining factors in establishing the regional resource base in Castle High School.

Irish-medium and Integrated Schools

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 5786/10 and AQW 5787/10, for an estimate of the number of additional staff required, by grade within her Department, to administer (i) Irish-medium schools; and (ii) integrated schools, given that pupils attending these schools could attend existing controlled and maintained schools. .

(AQW 6089/10)

Minister of Education: Dhíreoinn aird an Chomhalta ar an fhreagra a thug mé do AQW 5786/10, a foilsíodh sa Tuairisc Oifigiúil ar 26 Márta 2010, inar mhínigh mé go bhfuil Gaeloideachais agus oideachas comhtháite ina gcuid lárnach den chóras oideachais phríomhshruitha. Déanann foireann fud mo Roinne riarachán na scoileanna seo agus ní féidir meastachán a dhéanamh ar líon na bhfoireann a dhéanann na dualgais seo.

I refer the Member to my answer to AQW 5786/10, published in the Official Report on 26 March 2010 where I explained that Irish-medium and integrated education are an integral part of the mainstream education system. The administration of these schools is carried out by staff throughout my Department and it is not possible to estimate the number of staff who undertake these duties.

Unoccupied Seats and Desks in Schools

Ms D Purvis asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of unoccupied seats and desks in (i) controlled schools; (ii) maintained schools; (iii) integrated schools; and (iv) Irish-medium schools at (a) primary school level; and (b) post-primary school level in the 2008/09 and 2009/10 academic year.

(AQW 6172/10)

Minister of Education: Is mar seo a leanas atá líon na suíochán agus na ndeasc neamháitithe mar a shainmhínítear thíos i (i) scoileanna rialaithe; (ii) scoileanna faoi chothabháil; (iii) scoileanna comhtháite; agus (iv) Gaelscoileanna ag (a) leibhéal bunscoile; agus (b) leibhéal iarbhunscoile sna blianta acadúla 2008/09 agus 2009/10.

The number of unoccupied seats and desks as defined below in (i) controlled schools; (ii) maintained schools; (iii) integrated schools; and (iv) Irish-medium schools at (a) primary school level; and (b) post-primary school level in the 2008/09 and 2009/10 academic years is as follows.

Primary Schools		
	2008/09 School Year	2009/10 School Year
(i) Controlled	32,322	31,000
(ii) Maintained	33,299	33,689
(iii) Integrated	1,395	1,595
(iv) Irish-medium	625	753
Post-Primary Schools		
(i) Controlled (Excluding Controlled Grammar)	7,905	6,963
(ii) Maintained	9,785	9,666
(iii) Integrated	752	709
(iv) Irish-medium	62	32
Controlled and Voluntary Grammar	1,094	1,009

Source: School Access Team and Census October 2008 / October 2009

Figures provided have been derived from approved admissions number against actual enrolment at the census date and exclude pupils in receipt of a statement of special educational needs as they are admitted over and above the approved admissions / enrolment. For completeness, figures have also been provided in respect of post-primary controlled and voluntary grammar schools.

Department for Employment and Learning

South Eastern Regional College

Mr C McDevitt asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of the South Eastern Regional College's franchising of work to external providers, whose qualifications may not meet the standards specified in the FET (E) Regs (NI) 2007; and whether this undermines full-time and part-time employees who work under pay rates negotiated by the Lecturers' Negotiating Committee.

(AQW 5925/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning (Sir Reg Empey): With the exception of one lecturer who was teaching Essential Skills until recently, the South Eastern Regional College has assured me that the staff employed to teach courses funded by my Department comply with the standards specified in FET(E) Regs(NI) 2007. The College has since withdrawn this lecturer from teaching Essential Skills.

In terms of training to business and industry delivered on a full cost recovery basis and not funded by my Department, the College has, on occasion, employed sub contractors who are qualified in line with the requirement of the Awarding Body and are registered with them to deliver specific types of training. Regulation 7 of the FET(E) Regs(NI) 2007 provides for a person who is not a qualified teacher to be temporarily employed where a governing body is unable to secure the services of a qualified teacher. These courses for business and industry are demand driven and colleges need a degree of flexibility to be able to respond to their needs.

Funding for Voluntary and Community Sector

Ms C Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Employment and Learning (i) to detail the funding allocated by his Department to the voluntary and community sector in the Belfast area in the 2009/10 financial year; and (ii) how much of the funding was for (a) staff support; and (b) programmes.

(AQW 5963/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: To date, in the financial year 2009/10 my Department has allocated a total of £27,639,494 to the voluntary and community sector in the Belfast area. The funding has been provided through the Northern Ireland European Social Fund, the Careers Service, the Employment Service, and the Training for Success and Management and Leadership Programmes. Details are provided below however it is not always possible to separate the funding between staff support and programmes.

Funding is provided to 49 voluntary and community sector projects in the Belfast City Council area under the Northern Ireland European Social Fund (NIESF) Programme 2007 – 2013. The total project costs forecast for the 2009/10 financial year equate to £17,580,000, of which £7,030,000 (40%) is contributed by the European Social Fund, £4,370,000 (25%) by the Department, and the remaining 35% match funding is contributed by other public bodies. ESF funded projects are paid on the basis of eligible overhead costs, which include project staffing costs and therefore it is not possible to separate staff support and programme costs.

The Educational Guidance Service for Adults (EGSA) received core funding of £1,076,409 of which £792,157 was for staff costs and £284,252 in respect of all other costs. This was for the delivery of services in relation to educational guidance, introducing adults to learning and provision of an out-reach adult careers guidance service.

The Employment Service contracts for provision and services. It does not allocate funding to the voluntary and community sector. For the majority of provision, it is not possible to disaggregate the

payments to the voluntary and community sector for provision. However, under the Local Employment Intermediary Service £982K programme expenditure was paid to contracted providers in the voluntary / community sector in Belfast during 2009/10.

A total of £7,847,780 in 2009/10 has been paid out to those suppliers who are listed on the “voluntary and community database” in the delivery of training under the Training for Success, ApprenticeshipsNI and Jobskills programmes.

Programme funding of £153,305 was allocated in respect of the leadership and management development of social economy enterprises. A total of 6 organisations received support to determine and address management needs under the Management Analysis and Planning programme, 48 individual

employees were supported through the Management and Leadership Development Programme, and 12 organisations participated in the graduate INTRO programme.

Childcare Places in Women's Centres

Ms C Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Employment and Learning if his Department has supported childcare places in women's centres to assist women in returning to employment, training or education. **(AQW 5979/10)**

Minister for Employment and Learning: My Department places a high priority in providing assistance to removing barriers to employment, training and education. Childcare is recognised as one of the main barriers. To help address this, my Department provides financial assistance towards the costs of childcare incurred by certain participants in our training and employment programmes. This includes assistance, for example, to a number of participants on the Department's Steps to Work , Pathways to Work, Bridge to Employment, and Training for Success programmes . It is a matter for the individual to decide where to access their childcare. My Department also provides European Social Fund Programme funding to women's centres, which contributes to the cost of on-site crèches .

NEET

Mr C McDevitt asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what action his Department is taking to reduce the number of 16 to 24 year olds who are not in employment, education or training; and to detail any specific programmes being undertaken or funded by his Department and the success rates of these programmes.

(AQW 6014/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: My Department is currently carrying out a key piece of work in the form of a scoping study to learn more about those who are not in education, employment or training and this study should be completed very soon. These young people can face a variety of barriers of different origin and a wide spectrum of different degrees of challenge, which can be compounded, and which affect their ability to engage, right from their earliest years. The issue is pertinent to the responsibilities of several Northern Ireland departments and any specific action plan or strategy which might be developed on foot of the scoping study will need to be carried forward on a cross-departmental basis. With this in mind I intend to bring the results of this work to my Executive colleagues for consideration.

One of the characteristics of those who are not in education, employment or training can be a lack of educational qualifications. For example, in 2007/08, 80.1% of those young people who left school at year 12 did not achieve 5 GCSEs at grades A*- C including both English and Maths. This represented 8,046 young people of the 10,050 who left school. Clearly the need to improve educational attainment is a key component in any work to prevent young people from falling into inactivity.

With regard to my own Department, as well as taking forward the scoping study, DEL already has in place a wide range of programmes and initiatives to help people to enter and remain in education, employment or training, bearing in mind the current difficult economic circumstances. The following are examples of provision which are of particular relevance to and which will have a particular impact on those young people who are not in education, employment or training.

The Careers service provides impartial information, advice and guidance to young people throughout Northern Ireland to encourage and support them to achieve their potential. Through the Careers Service social inclusion policy a proactive approach is taken to identify all young people who are 'at risk' or vulnerable to social exclusion or disengagement from education, employment or training.

The Success through Skills Strategy, launched in February 2006, encompassed the Essential Skills Programme as a component of the Strategy with Essential Skills available within all DEL programmes (where appropriate). Essential Skills is now fully embedded in the Training for Success Programme (which focuses primarily on school leavers) while Essential Skills has replaced the Key Skills qualifications within the Apprenticeship NI Programme, and is a requirement for those apprentices who do not already have a GCSE A*-C grade or equivalent. Since the launch of the Essential Skills Strategy the number of learners enrolling in the Programme has increased year on year. Figures as at 5th March 2009 indicate that there have been just over 97,000 enrolments and that the majority of participants (69% (66,669) are in the 16-25 age group.

Training for Success provides training for 16 and 17 year olds and includes extended eligibility for those with a disability and for those in care. The programme is designed to enable participants to progress to a higher level of training, further education, or employment by providing training to address personal and social development needs, develop occupational skills and employability skills and, where necessary, Essential Skills training.

The joint work between DEL and the Department of Education, in relation to provision for 14-19 year olds, aims to ensure that each young person will be able to achieve their potential by following the programme of learning that is most appropriate to their needs and aspirations.

Widening participation initiatives in both Further Education and Higher Education provide opportunities for young people who may not otherwise access this level of education. Examples of these are:

- the Learner Access and Engagement Pilot Programme;
- the Care to Learn (NI) Scheme
- a widening participation premium which is paid to the universities for students from disadvantaged backgrounds and a premium for students with learning difficulties and disabilities;
- the Discovering Queen's project and the University of Ulster's Step-Up programme,
- the establishment of the Department's Higher Education Widening Participation Regional Strategy Group and the development of a Northern Ireland integrated regional strategy and action plan.

The Employment Service also offers a wide range of assistance to clients to help them overcome barriers to work and to move towards and into work. While these services are primarily targeted at those aged 18 and over some young people aged 16-18 may also access the service. More specifically, the Employment Service is currently piloting an Internship Scheme for unemployed graduates and a temporary employment programme for long term unemployed young people,

A wide range of provision is therefore available depending on the needs of the individual. This range of interventions and opportunities provides for, but is not exclusive to, those 16 to 24 year olds who are not or were not in employment, education or training at any point in time, and data on individual circumstances is not collected in a way which would enable success rates on these programmes to be differentiated in this manner.

Education Maintenance Allowance

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many people have (i) applied; and (ii) received an Education Maintenance Allowance in each constituency, in each of the last three years. **(AQW 6021/10)**

Minister for Employment and Learning: Data is not available in the constituency format requested, however, the table below details (i) the number of students who have made applications for Education

Maintenance Allowance; and (ii) the number approved for Education Maintenance Allowance in the last three full academic years within Northern Ireland.

Academic Year	2006 -2007	2007 - 2008	2008 – 2009
Total EMA Applications	21,458	21,564	22,872
Approved applications	19,857	19,898	20,956

Student Loans

Rev Dr R Coulter asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what proportion of student loans paid out to students at Universities in Northern Ireland in the past five years has been repaid.

(AQW 6032/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: The following table shows how much has been made in income contingent loan payments to, and repayments from, Northern Ireland domiciled and EU students for the two Northern Ireland universities and two university colleges in the last five financial years, for which data is available.

Financial Year/ University	Data	2004 -05 £'000s	2005 – 06 £'000s	2006 – 07 £'000s	2007 – 08 £'000s	2008 – 09 £'000s	Grand Total £'000s
Queen's University Belfast	Payment	22,278	23,663	30,125	39,849	44,367	160,283
	Repayment	1,109	1,780	2,898	4,009	6,647	16,443
University of Ulster	Payment	27,702	29,398	35,745	55,246	44,370	192,460
	Repayment	1,246	2,147	2,919	4,005	6,287	16,604
St Mary's University College (Belfast)	Payment	2,242	2,319	2,983	3,577	3,925	15,046
	Repayment	76	112	277	393	539	1,396
Stranmillis University College	Payment	2,017	2,079	2,553	3,142	3,420	13,210
	Repayment	162	233	393	531	689	2,009

Unsuccessful Applications for University

Rev Dr R Coulter asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many applications for a place at a university in Northern Ireland have been unsuccessful in each of the last three years.

(AQW 6033/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: Information provided by Queen's University, the University of Ulster, Stranmillis University College and St. Mary's University College is attached at Annex A.

I trust that you find this information helpful.

ANNEX A

NUMBER OF UNSUCCESSFUL APPLICATIONS TO UNIVERSITIES IN NORTHERN IRELAND

QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY BELFAST

Year	2009	2008	2007
Number of Unsuccessful Applications	2924	2723	3571

UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER

Year	2009	2008	2007
Number of Unsuccessful Applications	4970	4178	Unavailable

The University of Ulster has stated that data for entry 2007 was unavailable in the timeframe required. This was a transition year between student record systems and analysis would require considerable effort.

STRANMILLIS UNIVERSITY COLLEGE

Year	2009	2008	2007
Number of Unsuccessful Applications	913	1026	1255

NB: It should be noted that under the UCAS system, applicants can submit up to five choices and will receive a decision on each application from the universities to which they have applied.

ST. MARY'S UNIVERSITY COLLEGE

Year	2009	2008	2007
Number of Unsuccessful Applications	2722	1927	2421

Recovery Fees from Non-EU Students

Rev Dr R Coulter asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how much revenue was generated from full-cost recovery fees from non-EU students at universities, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 6034/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: The revenue generated from the full cost recovery of fees from non-EU students at university and university colleges in Northern Ireland in each of the last three years is detailed below.

	06/07 £million	07/08 £million	08/09 £million
Queen's University	6.482	7.077	7.493
University of Ulster	2.671	3.050	3.490

The only non-EU full cost recovery fee income that Stranmillis University College has had in the last 3 years was £16,870 in 2008/09.

St. Mary's University College Belfast did not generate any revenue from full cost recovery of fees from non-EU students in the last three years.

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment**Invest NI**

Mr M McLaughlin asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to list (i) the ten largest commercial projects currently under consideration for funding by Invest NI; (ii) the total amount of funding that may be offered to these projects; and (iii) to estimate the number of jobs that may be created by each funding allocation.

(AQW 5568/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mrs A Foster): Invest NI's negotiations with companies in respect of any potential project must remain confidential given the commercial sensitivities involved. In each case, the amount of funding, overall level of total investment and any associated job creation figures will not be determined until the appropriate due diligence process has been completed.

Private Sector Productivity Gap

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her Department's assessment of the key barriers to Northern Ireland achieving its goal of halving the private sector productivity gap with the rest of the UK by 2015.

(AQW 5643/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The productivity goal as stated in the Programme for Government is an ambitious target which aims to raise living standards in Northern Ireland relative to other parts of the UK. I commissioned the Independent Review of Economic Policy to provide advice on DETI & Invest NI policies, programmes and resources to ensure that they are fully aligned to help achieve this goal.

The Review Panel supported the Executive's focus on productivity, and outlined a number of challenges that need to be addressed, for example:

- Increase Innovation & R&D, which the Review Panel considered to be the most important productivity driver to help the Northern Ireland economy move up the value chain;
- Ensure that the workforce is equipped to support the increased emphasis on Innovation and R&D;
- Widen the export base in Northern Ireland ; and
- Give a greater economic focus to future investment strategies.

Of course, the challenges highlighted above do not sit solely within the remit of my Department and Invest NI and, as the Review Panel stated, it is essential that other Departments also work to address the productivity agenda.

As I indicated in my statement to the Assembly (25 January 2010), I have begun the process of taking forward many of the Panel's recommendations that fall to my Department and Invest NI. I am also currently working with my Executive colleagues to agree how we develop a cross-departmental economic strategy which will outline how we will continue to meet the challenge of increasing private sector productivity in Northern Ireland.

Department of the Environment

Bonuses Paid to Non-Civil Servants

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of the Environment for a breakdown of any bonuses paid in the 2009/10 financial year to persons, other than civil servants, from within the Department's overall budget.

(AQW 5860/10)

Minister of the Environment (Mr E Poots): My Department has not paid bonuses to non-civil servants from within its overall budget during the 2009/10 financial year.

Draft Electoral Law Act (Northern Ireland) 1962 (Amendment) Order 2010

Mr D Kinahan asked the Minister of the Environment what discussions he has had with the Northern Ireland Office in relation to the Draft Electoral Law Act (Northern Ireland) 1962 (Amendment) Order 2010.

(AQW 5977/10)

Minister of the Environment: I met with Minister of State, Mr Paul Goggins, on 1 September 2009 to discuss the possible amendment of the Electoral Law Act (Northern Ireland) 1962 to enable casual vacancies on councils resulting from a severance scheme for councillors to be filled by co-option.

Areas of Special Scientific Interest

Mr D Ford asked the Minister of the Environment (i) what is the current target for ensuring that Areas of Special Scientific Interest are in or approaching a favourable condition; (ii) how many sites have reached a favourable condition; and (iii) what action his Department is taking to ensure the target is achieved.

(AQW 6012/10)

Minister of the Environment:

- (i) Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) is working to a target to ensure that 95% of the features underlying the designation of Areas of Special Scientific Interest (ASSIs) are in, or approaching, favourable conservation condition by 2016.
- (ii) In March 2008 the first full monitoring cycle was completed, allowing a comprehensive assessment of the condition of the ASSI network to be made. The results show that 69% of the features on ASSIs were in or approaching favourable condition.
- (iii) NIEA is working proactively, and in partnership with other Departments and NGOs, to ensure that site selection features on designated sites are in favourable condition.

Through its own Management of Sensitive Sites (MOSS) scheme, NIEA funds conservation measures on ASSIs to ensure that site selection features achieve their target condition.

In addition NIEA has developed a partnership arrangement with DARD to favour designated lands in the delivery of the Northern Ireland Countryside Management Scheme (NICMS). Under this scheme 8,399ha of land within ASSIs was brought under a beneficial management regime in 2009. NICMS is expected to deliver significant benefits to ASSIs for the duration of the Rural Development Programme 2007-13.

Bonuses to Civil Servants

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 5045/10, what checks were carried out on the efficiency of the work of the civil servants prior to payment of bonuses.

(AQW 6016/10)

Minister of the Environment: Two distinct processes were involved in awarding the bonuses to civil servants in the years in question.

For the Senior Civil Service (SCS) grades the bonuses were paid as an integral part of the SCS pay award for each year within the terms of the annual Pay Strategy approved by the relevant Ministers at the time. The pay strategies for the years in question specified that approximately 75% of SCS staff in each department should be given a non-consolidated bonus as part of their annual pay award. Non-consolidated bonus awards were intended to be the primary reward for in year performance against individuals' personal objectives and were paid after the end of the financial year in respect of the previous year. Bonus payments were made to approximately 75% of all SCS staff in each department on the basis of an assessment of their performance relative to their colleagues.

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.

Local Government Boundaries Commissioner

Mr D Kinahan asked the Minister of the Environment on how many occasions recommendations of the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner have been adopted without modification.

(AQW 6096/10)

Minister of the Environment: The Local Government Boundaries Commissioner has made recommendations on three occasions, in 1972, 1984 and in 1992. On each occasion, the recommendations were accepted without modification.

Food Waste

Mr D Hilditch asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the introduction of the recycling of food waste within some local council areas.

(AQO 1019/10)

Minister of the Environment: Food waste accounts for an estimated 25% of household waste in Northern Ireland the majority of which is landfilled. However, I am pleased to advise that in recent years many local councils have introduced food waste collections, generally along with garden waste, to enable more of this waste to be recycled and composted.

There is strong evidence that, where it is practical, the separate collection and treatment of food waste can deliver greater net benefits than when it is collected and treated with garden waste. I understand that three councils – Belfast, Newtownabbey and Castlereagh - have therefore commissioned pilot food waste collection trials to test the feasibility of source segregated food waste collections.

Whilst welcoming the work which has been undertaken to date I am convinced that there is much further potential to recycle more of our food waste and would urge local councils to take steps to boost recycling of this key waste stream. Ultimately, this will reduce the amount of waste sent to landfill, reduce the burden on ratepayers and ensure Northern Ireland is on track to meet statutory targets for landfill diversion and recycling.

Local Government Reorganisation

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of the Environment when he will introduce the remaining legislative measures to give effect to Local Government re-organisation.

(AQO 1022/10)

Minister of the Environment: I am fully committed to the reform process and to successfully delivering a strong and effective local government.

To this end I have met Executive party representatives over the last 2 weeks to discuss Local Government reform and find a common way forward.

Those meetings have been a constructive stock taking exercise and more are to follow.

Planning Policy Statement 21

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister of the Environment when he expects draft PPS21 to become policy.

(AQO 1023/10)

Minister of the Environment: I will publish PPS21 and PPS4 as soon as each is agreed by the Executive Committee.

I submitted PPS21 for Executive consideration in December 2009. My predecessor submitted PPS 4 in December 2008. Due to the passage of time, I had to update PPS 4 and resubmit it in November 2009.

In both cases, we have taken full account of issues raised by other Ministers, including amending the documents where it was right to do so.

Local Government Reorganisation

Mr F Cobain asked the Minister of the Environment what contingency plans have been put in place in the event that the legislative timetable for Local Government re-organisation is not met.

(AQO 1027/10)

Minister of the Environment: As I have stated previously in the House, I am fully committed to the reform process and to successfully delivering a strong and effective local government.

To this end I have met Executive party representatives over the last 2 weeks to discuss Local Government reform and find a common way forward.

Those meetings have been a constructive stock taking exercise and more are to follow.

Wave and Tidal Energy

Mr A Maskey asked the Minister of the Environment what discussions he has had with the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment regarding any plans for wave and tidal energy projects.

(AQO 1028/10)

Minister of the Environment: I have not had specific discussions with my colleague Minister Foster on wave and tidal projects. My officials from the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) have, however, been in formal discussions with Department of Enterprise Trade and Investment (DETI) colleagues on marine renewable technologies over recent years. These discussions were initiated at the instigation of the Marine Current Turbine project within Strangford Lough.

In the last 2 years, my officials have been actively participating in a DETI-led cross-departmental Project Steering Group, which has been developing a draft Offshore Renewable Energy Strategic Action Plan for the period 2009-2020. The Plan has been the subject of a Strategic Environmental Assessment and those documents have recently been through a three month public consultation.

Drivers: Curfews

Mrs M O'Neill asked the Minister of the Environment why his Department is considering the introduction of night-time curfews for less experienced drivers.

(AQO 1029/10)

Minister of the Environment: I have asked my officials to consider the introduction of a night time curfew from late in the evening to the early hours of the morning for unaccompanied novice drivers because I believe that this measure has the potential to save lives and avoid serious injuries on our roads.

17 to 24 year old car drivers in Northern Ireland are over represented in fatal and serious collisions, many of which occur at night and particularly at weekends. Between 2004 and 2008, 55% of all car fatalities and serious casualties occurring between 11 pm and 5am for which the car driver was responsible were caused by a driver aged 17 to 24, even though they only represent 11% of car driver licence holders.

My officials are currently preparing a consultation paper on proposals which will include an option to introduce a night time curfew as well as other possible elements in a new system of graduated driver licensing to replace the current 'R' driver scheme. It will also contain options on amending the current 45 mph speed restriction that currently applies to learner and restricted drivers.

Review of Public Administration

Mr D Ford asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the Local Government aspects of the Review of Public Administration.

(AQO 1031/10)

Minister of the Environment: With your permission Mr Speaker, I propose to answer Questions 5, 10 and 14 together;

As I have stated previously in this House, I am fully committed to the reform process and to successfully delivering a strong and effective local government.

To this end I have met Executive party representatives over the last 2 weeks to discuss Local Government reform and find a common way forward.

Those meetings have been a constructive stock taking exercise and more are to follow.

Department of Finance and Personnel

Childcare Places in Women's Centres

Ms C Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel if his Department has supported childcare places in women's centres to assist women returning to employment, education and training over the last three years.

(AQW 5990/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr S Wilson): My department has not provided any support for childcare places in women's centres to assist women returning to employment, education and training over the last three years.

Deprivation Rating

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to list the wards in Northern Ireland in order of their deprivation rating.

(AQW 5993/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure 2010 was reported for small areas where rank 1 is the most deprived area and rank 890 is the least deprived area. These small areas are called Super Output Areas and are either electoral wards or subdivisions of electoral wards.

The list of Super Output Areas with deprivation ranking from 1 to 890 has been placed in the Library. Further more detailed and summary results, including an electoral ward level summary measure, will be issued later in Summer 2010.

Rates Collection

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how much additional money would be raised by Land and Property Services if the percentage of rates collected were to be increased by 1%.

(AQW 6042/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: Audited rate revenue and rate collection details for year ending 31 March 2010 are not yet available.

For year ending 31 March 2009 for which audited accounts are available records show that the amount of collectible rate, that is to say rate revenue due net of exemptions, reliefs, vacant property etc amounted to £985million.

Each percentage point of collectible rate therefore had the potential to raise £9.85million in combined district and regional rate income.

Civil Service: Female Staff

Ms C Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how he intends to improve promotion opportunities for female Civil Servants.

(AQO 1038/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The Northern Ireland Civil Service is committed to providing equality of opportunity. It is our policy that all eligible persons shall have equal opportunity for employment and advancement in the NICS on the basis of their ability, qualifications and aptitude for the work regardless of gender or any other characteristic.

10-day Prompt Payment Service

Mr C Boylan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what mechanisms are in place to ensure that contractors who receive payments from Government Departments within the specified ten-day period pass on the benefit of prompt payment to sub-contractors.

(AQO 1039/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: Although it is not a contractually binding requirement, Government as a best practice client, is committed to paying suppliers within 10 days of the receipt of a valid invoice.

The NEC3 form of contract, adopted by Central Procurement Directorate for all construction works and services contracts, requires the main contractor to use subcontracts with terms that are consistent with the main contract.

The Construction Industry Forum has agreed further measures aimed at improving payment progress to subcontractors. In new construction works contracts tendered after 1 March 2010, the main contractor will be required to sign a 'Fair Payment' Charter. The commitments set out in the Charter will be regularly monitored by the client's Project Manager.

Supplies and services contracts also require contractors to pay all sums due to subcontractors within 30 days of the receipt of a valid invoice. If a subcontractor makes the Government client aware of poor payment performance by a contractor, the client can apply the appropriate conditions of contract in an effort to resolve the issue.

Public Sector Salaries

Dr A McDonnell asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what plans he has to review excessive salaries at senior levels in the public sector.

(AQO 1041/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The Executive now has a comprehensive set of controls in place to monitor and approve pay awards for senior officials across the wider public sector.

It is mandatory for all departments to seek DFP approval on proposals to award pay increases. I have already determined that there should be no bonus payments made for the 2008-09 reporting year and I have also commissioned an independent review into local senior civil service remuneration packages.

Corporation Tax

Mrs C McGill asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what discussions he has had with the Economic Reform Group regarding its proposal to reduce Corporation Tax.

(AQO 1042/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: I have not yet had direct discussions with this Economic Reform Group. My officials, however, have had discussions and my concerns about their report have been conveyed.

It is my view that the ERG report doesn't add anything new to the debate that took place at the time of the Varney studies. Indeed, this ERG report raises a number of important unanswered questions. The most obvious unanswered questions 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.

Rather unhelpfully 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.

Furthermore, the understanding of the public expenditure system is flawed in places, suggesting an incomplete knowledge of what scores within the Northern Ireland DEL allocation and what doesn't. In the current UK fiscal environment any engagement with HM Treasury which seeks to open the Northern Ireland Block allocation could have very damaging consequences.

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.

Land and Property Services

Mrs M Bradley asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of the performance of Land and Property Services in relation to rates collection.

(AQO 1043/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: At 28 February 2010 Land & Property Services had collected

£ 957 million, which is an increase of some £23.2 million in comparison to the cash collected at the same time last year. This means that Land & Property Services is on track once again to improve on the amount of cash collected in-year.

In the difficult economic circumstances this is a good performance given the collection challenge, which has necessitated an increasing volume of recovery activity. This has also led to improved performance as shown by the

- 16% increase in court processes issued;
- 9.5% increase in court decrees awarded, and;
- 8% increase in notices of intention to enforce debt.

In addition, LPS has

- made sure that the 2010 rating reforms are on track;
- worked closely with councils in developing key performance indicators, and;
- improved its interface with ratepayers through a redesign of the 2010 rate bill and accompanying information, and updating the available payment methods.

Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measures

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel when the Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure will be updated and when a report on this issue will be available.

(AQO 1044/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: Results from the Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure 2010 were published by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency on 31 March. The findings can be found on the DFP website.

The final report from this research will be published later in the summer.

Public Prosecution Service

Mr M Durkan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what role his Department will play in the oversight of the Public Prosecution Service following the devolution of policing and justice.

(AQO 1045/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: Upon devolution, the Public Prosecution Service (PPS) was established as a non Ministerial Department by virtue of the section 86 order amendment to section 29 of the Justice (Northern Ireland) Act 2002. DFP has a role in the general oversight of public finances as managed by departments, including the PPS.

DFP sets the ground rules for the administration of public monies as regards regularity, propriety and value for money and discharges its oversight role through its on-going engagement with departments, including its approval role for certain expenditure and other matters, when necessary.

DFP is also responsible for the appointment and if necessary the removal of the Accounting Officer who is answerable to the Assembly for the use of resources and for the administration of the PPS.

Civil Service: Equal Pay

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what plans he has to ensure that Civil Servants seconded to the PSNI, NIO and other public bodies receive the benefit of the NICS equal pay settlement.

(AQO 1046/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: I have no plans to ensure that civil servants seconded to other organisations benefit from the NICS equal pay settlement over and above their entitlement under the terms of the settlement. The settlement will include periods of service for NICS employees seconded to other organisations provided that, during the period of secondment, the NICS remained responsible for negotiating the secondees' pay.

Spending Cuts

Rev Dr R Coulter asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what contingency plans he has in place to deal with the projections, from the European Commission and the Deputy Governor of the Bank of England, of £25 billion additional budget cuts in the UK after the General Election.

(AQO 1047/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The level of available funding to the NI Executive for the period beyond 2010-11 will only be confirmed at the conclusion of the next UK-wide Spending Review, which is due to take place later in 2010.

The Executive will shortly begin work on the local Budget process which will be taken forward on the basis of the latest projections from HM Treasury in respect of the level of public spending in the coming years.

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

School Nurses

Mrs M O'Neill asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if all school nurses have received their pay banding under Agenda for Change.

(AQW 5971/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Mr M McGimpsey): All school nurses, with the exception of those employed in the former Homefirst Trust area, have received their Agenda for Change pay banding. Given the level of professional qualification required for the school nurse posts in the former Homefirst Trust area these jobs were referred for full job evaluation in order to determine the grade. This process has recently been completed and the outcome is being checked in accordance with the processes agreed with the Trade Unions. When the checking process is completed, these staff will be moved to the appropriate Agenda for Change rate of pay.

School Nurses

Mrs M O'Neill asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he is aware of any problems in implementing the Agenda For Change process for school nurses who were employed by the former Homefirst Trust.

(AQW 5972/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: All school nurses, with the exception of those employed in the former Homefirst Trust area, have received their Agenda for Change pay banding. Given the level of professional qualification required for the school nurse posts in the former Homefirst Trust area these jobs were referred for full job evaluation in order to determine the grade. This process has recently been completed and the outcome is being checked in accordance with the processes agreed with the Trade Unions. When the checking process is completed, these staff will be moved to the appropriate Agenda for Change rate of pay.

Prescription Charges

Mr D Hilditch asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to confirm the date on which prescriptions will become free of charge.

(AQW 5974/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Prescriptions charges were abolished in Northern Ireland from 1 April 2010.

Roe Valley Hospital in Limavady

Mr B Leonard asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if all current services at the Roe Valley Hospital in Limavady are secure, will remain fully operational and continue to be available to the community.

(AQW 5976/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Western Health and Social Care Trust is responsible for the configuration of local services in the Limavady area. The Trust has advised me that it has no plans to discontinue any of the services currently provided at the Roe Valley Hospital

Regional Laboratory Tender

Mrs M O'Neill asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when a decision will be made and notified on the Regional Laboratory Tender, given that the South Eastern Trust is required to have its laboratories operational under a new contract by September 2010.

(AQW 5978/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Tender submissions are currently being adjudicated on by the Health and Social Care Trusts. The intention is to award a contract during May 2010.

Passive Smoking

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many children aged 16 and under have been treated for conditions related to passive smoking in each of the last 5 years.

(AQW 5982/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information is not available on the number of children aged 16 and under who have been treated for conditions related to passive smoking.

Wasted Medication and Unused Disposable Medical Equipment

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the estimated financial value of (i) wasted medication; and (ii) unused disposable medical equipment in each Health and Social Care Trust, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 5985/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: This information is not held centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Consultants' Bonuses

Ms C Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) to detail the number of consultants, in each hospital, who have received a bonus in the last two financial years; (ii) to detail the bonuses awarded; and (iii) how many of these consultants also currently work in the private sector. **(AQW 5988/10)**

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: There were no bonuses paid to consultants in the last two financial years.

Go Generic Initiative

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if patients, who require a specific brand of medication to ensure medical management and quality of life, will be exempt from the Go Generic initiative. **(AQW 6002/10)**

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Since 2006 Generic Prescribing has been one of the key policies of my Department. The use of generic medicines in favour of branded equivalents is a central strand in my Department's overall strategy to improve quality in medicines management for all patients through cost-effective prescribing.

Judicial Review: Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child

Mr J Wells asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the costs incurred by his Department as a result of the judicial review brought by the Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child in relation to the guidance on abortion. **(AQW 6005/10)**

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The cost of the recent High Court case between Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child and DHSSPS has not yet been finalised.

Secure Health Units

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many individuals have escaped or absconded from secure health units in each of the last five years, broken down by institution. **(AQW 6019/10)**

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: There is only one secure health unit in Northern Ireland from which one patient absconded in 2007/08

The Bamford Review

Mr M Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the recommendations of the Bamford Review which will require staff training and development to be taken forward in partnership with the institutions of higher and further education. **(AQW 6036/10)**

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Bamford Review included almost 700 recommendations, which together represent a composite vision for the reform and modernisation of mental health and learning disability law, policy and services.

The recommendations are wide and varied and many would involve the need for staff training, including that provided in further and higher education.

I published an Action Plan for 2009-2011 in October 2009 which was the Executive's response to the Bamford Review. Work is currently underway to address taking forward service development in line with

this action plan, and the determination of the staff training and development required will form part of that work.

The Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority

Mr M Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the research and development capacity of the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority; and to provide an update on its progress in this field.

(AQW 6038/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority's (RQIA) main role is the regulation (registration and inspection) of establishments and agencies providing health and social care services. It also has a duty to encourage improvement in the quality of services across the wider HSC sector.

The future development of its own research strategy is an integral part of RQIA's Corporate Strategy for 2009-12. Once in place, this strategy will be used to promote and encourage research into the improvement of quality in health and social care services for patients and clients.

Mrs Iris Robinson's Treatment in a Private London Clinic

Mr C McDevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether Mrs Iris Robinson's treatment in a private London clinic is being wholly or partially paid for by her local Health and Social Care Trust, the Health Service or any other Government Department, agency or body.

(AQW 6056/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: It would not be appropriate to provide information on the particular arrangements in place for the treatment or care of any individual.

Department Buildings

Mr J Bell asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to list the buildings occupied by his Department or any of its agencies which are owned by him or members of his family.

(AQW 6060/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Neither I nor any member of my family owns any building occupied by the Department or any of its agencies.

I would, however, refer Mr Bell to my entry in the Register of Member's Interests on the Northern Ireland Assembly website. Since being elected to the Northern Ireland Assembly in 1998, I have declared that I am a Director of North Down Hotels Ltd and a shareholder in North Down Construction Limited. These companies lease two healthcare facilities to the South Eastern Trust from 1993 and 1995 respectively.

Waterside Hospital in Derry

Mr C McDevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) how many beds are currently available in Ward 3 in the Waterside Hospital in Derry; (ii) whether this Ward is set to close; and (iii) for his assessment of the impact the closure of this Ward will have on patients and staff.

(AQW 6131/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Ward 3 in Waterside Hospital in Londonderry provides 18 continuing care beds for individuals with long standing mental health concerns.

There are currently no plans to close Ward 3. In line with the Bamford Review, older people with mental health needs will undergo comprehensive assessments to assess how best to meet their needs.

Ward 3 will provide new interim accommodation for Elderly Mentally Infirm and Functional Mentally Infirm assessment wards.

Department of Justice

Custodial Sentences for Non-payment of Fines

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Justice to detail the number of people who have received custodial sentences for non-payment of fines in each of the last five years; and to provide a breakdown of the reasons why the original fines were imposed.

(AQW 6127/10)

Minister of Justice (Mr D Ford): The number of Northern Ireland prison receptions for fine default by year and original offence category for the fine are given in the Table below:

Original Offence Category	Year				
	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Violence against the person	115	136	143	215	174
Sexual	9	11	9	13	18
Burglary	9	11	9	28	28
Theft	82	102	84	115	107
Fraud & forgery	14	18	19	38	47
Criminal damage	78	138	109	115	108
Motoring offences	1,132	1,071	910	712	674
Drug offences	29	41	51	62	55
Other	346	423	390	444	400
Total	1,814	1,951	1,724	1,742	1,611

Equal Pay Claims of PSNI Civil Servants

Mr D McNarry asked the Minister of Justice to outline his plans for dealing with the equal pay claims of PSNI civil servants.

(AQW 6130/10)

Minister of Justice : Since October 2008, civilian staff in the PSNI have been employed by the Chief Constable on behalf of the Policing Board and he has lead responsibility for dealing with the equal pay claims.

As my Department has an approval role under the corporate governance arrangements for the PSNI, my officials have been in discussion with the PSNI and Policing Board officials about whether a legal liability exists in respect of the application to police staff of the equal pay settlement negotiated by DFP and legal advice is currently being sought.

Abuse of Trust Provisions in the Sexual Offences (NI) Order 2008

Mr J McCallister asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the extension of abuse of trust provisions in the Sexual Offences (NI) Order 2008 to sports coaches and other positions of trust.

(AQW 6163/10)

Minister of Justice : I will decide how to respond to the proposal for extension of this offence when I have fully considered the policy advice, including the evidence from the recent consultation with sports bodies undertaken by the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure. I will write to the Member and other key stakeholders when I have reached a conclusion.

Department for Regional Development

Senior Citizen SmartPass

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development what percentage of current Senior Citizen SmartPass holders have made use of their passes.

(AQW 5997/10)

Minister for Regional Development (Mr C Murphy): The information is not available in the form requested. However in the year ending 28 March 2009, 122,814 Senior SmartPasses were used at least once. This compares with the 206,110 Senior SmartPasses in circulation on 28 March 2010. It should be noted that cards have a duration of five years. The figure for passes in circulation will include those where the holder has moved away or has died but the card has not been returned to Translink as well as cards used in earlier years.

Senior Citizen SmartPass

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development what percentage of eligible people have obtained a Senior Citizen SmartPass.

(AQW 5999/10)

Minister for Regional Development: As of 29 March 2010, there were 206,143 Senior SmartPasses in circulation. My Department does not maintain a record of the number of eligible persons. However, according to the 2008 mid-year population estimate published by Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (the latest available), there were 248,779 persons aged 65 and over resident in the North.

Damage to the Road System

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the additional damage to the road system caused by the higher incidence of freezing temperatures over the past winter.

(AQW 6001/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the recent repeated freezing and thawing cycle has had a damaging effect on the road network causing the carriageway to split and potholes to form. The table below provides details of the total number of surface defects recorded during the first two months of this year, as well as comparable figures for the first two months in each of the previous three years. As can be seen from the table, there has been a significant increase in the number of defects recorded, following the recent prolonged cold spell:

	1 January – 28 February 2007	1 January – 29 February 2008	1 January – 28 February 2009	1 January – 28 February 2010
Number of defects recorded*	26,744	26,600	37,694	45,523

* Total number of recorded surface defects (including potholes) in the carriageway, hard shoulder and lay-bys.

Funding for Road Repairs

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister for Regional Development if he intends to allocate further funding within his Department for road repairs, in light of the UK budget announcement of additional funding for road repairs and improvements to motorways in England and Wales.

(AQW 6003/10)

Minister for Regional Development: All allocations received by the Executive through the Barnett Formula from additional funding announced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer are unhypothecated. That is to say that they are available to the Executive to spend in correspondence with local needs and priorities.

None of the funding announced by the Chancellor has been allocated to my Department for road repairs here at this stage. However the Executive has previously provided £15 million in additional funding for Roads Structural Maintenance, as part of the 2009-10 December Monitoring Round.

Solid Concrete Crash Barriers

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the additional cost to his Department of providing solid concrete crash barriers in place of steel and wire crash barriers.
(AQW 6004/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the initial construction cost, excluding drainage, of the concrete higher containment rigid Road Restraint Systems (RRS), is approximately £80 per metre length, compared to £25 per metre length for the least expensive flexible RRS wire rope system.

Both restraint systems have differing characteristics under impact. Following an independent Highways Agency study on safety and whole life costing, higher containment rigid RRS are now specified by the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges for motorways or roads constructed to motorway standard, with a two-way annual average daily traffic flow greater or equal to 25,000 vehicles/day. This is deemed necessary to minimise cross-over accidents, reduce the need for steel and wire safety barriers to be repaired, or maintained. As well as minimising the congestion and costs arising from temporary traffic management, it should also reduce the risk to maintenance workers.

Potholes and Resurfacing in the Upper Bann

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister for Regional Development how much his Department has spent on repairing potholes and resurfacing in the Upper Bann constituency in each of the last five years.
(AQW 6026/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it does not hold details of its expenditure on road maintenance on a parliamentary constituency basis, nor does it record separately the amount spent on repairing potholes and resurfacing. However, the table below details the Structural Maintenance expenditure, which includes resurfacing, surface dressing, structural drainage and patching carriageways and footways, for each of the last five financial years, in the Craigavon and Banbridge Council areas, which fall fully and partly within the Upper Bann constituency.

Year	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/2010
Expenditure	£4.5 million	£4.5 million	£5.3 million	£4.0 million	£6.3 million

Claims for Falls and Injuries

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the cost of claims against his Department for falls and injuries in (i) the Craigavon Borough Council area; and (ii) the Newry and Mourne District Council area, in each of the last five years.
(AQW 6027/10)

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 five financial years, in respect of the two 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. The figures provided for 2009/10 are not yet final but no significant changes are anticipated.

Total Cost of Claims Including Legal and Other Costs		
Personal Injury		
	Craigavon £	Newry £
2009/10	109,580.00	226,423.56
2008/09	103,090.00	134,470.44
2007/08	300,149.84	219,665.31
2006/07	125,797.26	105,030.32
2005/06	223,350.29	119,750.53

Closket River, Armagh

Mr J O'Dowd asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) if any harmful substances were found in the river or on the river bed as a result of the water tests carried out by NI Water on the Closket River, Co Armagh over the last 24 months; and (ii) what remedial work is planned by NI Water for the Closket River.

(AQW 6028/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that the Water Research Centre (WRC) undertook a survey on its behalf to analyse sediment samples in the Closet River for a range of metals and organic compounds. All the substances involved occur naturally in the environment and hence they will be present at some concentration in samples taken from River. Substances are classified as hazardous or non-hazardous on an assessment of properties listed in the EC Hazardous Waste Directive. The WRC investigation indicated that the Closet River sediments should be treated as non-hazardous.

NIW has been in discussion with all interested parties to agree a way forward and arrangements are currently being made to undertake a trial dredging to assess the practicalities of removing water logged silt from the river bed and drying it prior to landfill disposal. Following the trial, NIW will approach all registered landowners to obtain rights of entry to undertake the dredging and removal of silt. It is intended to proceed with the dredging exercise later in the Spring subject to suitable weather and ground conditions, the agreement of all relevant riparian landowners, final consent from all relevant statutory authorities and the availability of funding.

Sewerage Smell at Downpatrick Street, Killyleagh

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development what action he is taking to address the ongoing sewerage smell at Downpatrick Street, Killyleagh.

(AQW 6068/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that, following earlier complaints, it undertook remedial work on the pumping main at Downpatrick Road, Killyleagh to reduce malodours in the area. The work included the sealing of two manhole chambers and the installation of a vent stack to disperse malodours.

NIW has received no complaints about malodours in the area since the work was completed in November 2009, but will be contacting you to arrange a meeting to discuss your concerns.

Money Allocated for Water Works

Mr B McElduff asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the amount of money allocated for (i) water treatment works; (ii) waste water; (iii) clear water; and (iv) waste incinerators in each of the last three financial years.

(AQW 6085/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that the 2009/10 financial results have not yet been finalised and it is unable to provide the information sought for that year. The operating costs requested for the previous two financial years are detailed in the table below with the reference to clear water taken as drinking water:

Function	2007/08 £ million	2008/09
Water Treatment Works	17.9	25.6 (including £4.0 million for Alpha Public Private Partnership)

The following operating costs relate to wastewater treatment works.

Function	2007/08 £ million	2008/09
Wastewater Treatment Works	24.5 (including £2.9 million for Public Private Partnership)	34.9 (including £6.6 million for Public Private Partnership)

The following operating costs relate to waste incineration.

Function	2007/08 £ million	2008/09
Waste Incinerators	3.2	4.3

Department for Social Development

Girdwood Site

Ms C Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Social Development when the procurement process into the provision of 200 social homes in the Girdwood site will start; and if she will ensure that social clauses are built into any procurement contract.

(AQW 5913/10)

Minister for Social Development (Ms M Ritchie): I am keen to see housing delivered on Girdwood to meet the significant housing need that exists in North Belfast.

Proposals to take this forward are still at an early stage and the Housing Executive are currently in the process of identifying a Housing Association to take this forward. Effectively the start of the procurement process.

Subject to receiving the necessary approvals, I would expect work to begin during 2011/12 for the first phase of 100 homes with the second phase again provisionally programmed for 2012/13.

Funding for Womens' Groups

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the funding provided by her Department to each women's group in each of the last three years; and to list the programme through which each group is funded.

(AQW 6040/10)

Minister for Social Development: The information requested is as follows:

Group Name	Funding in 2007/08	Funding in 2008/09	Funding in 2009/10
Community Investment Fund	£	£	£
Atlas Women's Centre	78,357.00	79,016.00	69,998.60
Ballybeen Women's Centre	80,406.44	80,000.00	75,000.00
Chrysalis Women's Centre	55,872.05	56,792.00	54,892.05
First Steps Women's Group	75,569.79	78,379.99	66,169.85
Footprints Women's Centre	80,000.00	80,000.00	75,000.00
Foyle Women's Information Network	50,315.21	51,232.25	50,000.00
Greenway Women's Group	79,998.80	80,000.00	75,000.00
Magherafelt Women's Group	77,277.37	77,065.09	69,979.45
Strathfoyle Women's Activity Group Ltd	69,769.42	72,419.68	69,993.64
The Women's Centre Derry	78,246.00	80,000.00	74,997.22
Waterside Women's Centre	48,950.00	54,251.00	53,000.00
Windsor Women's Centre	45,580.73	76,897.21	70,000.00

Children and Young Peoples Fund (CYPF) /Women's Centres Childcare Fund (WCCF)	2007/08 (CYPF) £	2008/09 (WCCF) £	2009/10 (WCCF) £
Atlas Women's Centre	50,662.78	47,651.18	47,866.80
Ballybeen Women's Centre	171,650.16	175,270.20	179,564.30
Chrysalis Women's Centre	20,781.82	21,306.98	21,818.62
Falls Women's Centre	76,506.54	52,383.65	53,742.01
First Steps Women's Group	46,415.85	39,765.48	40,526.34
Footprints Women's Centre	94,029.91	88,263.31	109,562.14
Greenway Women's Group	76,592.88	65,016.10	66,108.69
Magherafelt Women's Group	119,887.54	121,678.42	124,831.02
Shankill Women's Centre	48,303.21	49,670.35	50,995.67
Strathfoyle Women's Activity Group Ltd	14,250.64	13,512.88	14,069.44
The Women's Centre Derry	24,129.00	30,487.96	31,211.78

Children and Young Peoples Fund (CYPF) /Women's Centres Childcare Fund (WCCF)	2007/08 (CYPF) £	2008/09 (WCCF) £	2009/10 (WCCF) £
Waterside Women's Centre	31,770.74	35,743.92	36,628.23
Windsor Women's Centre	106,443.10	109,371.48	112,022.76

Regional Infrastructure Programme	2007/08 £	2008/09 £	2009/10 £
Women's Centres Regional Partnership	321,631.52	353,921.68	362,257.31

Grants to Voluntary Bodies	2007/08 £	2008/09 £	2009/10 £
Omagh Women's Area Network	25,399.44	54,600.56	-

Modernisation Fund	2007/08 £	2008/09 £	2009/10 £
Women's Tec	90,714.37	33,804.79	-

Community Volunteering Scheme (CVS)/ Small Grants (SG)	2007/08 (CVS) £	2008/09 (CVS) £	2009/10 (SG) £
Ardoyne Women's Group	-	1,000.00	1,100.00
Boho Women's Group	-	-	850.00
Carrickfergus Women's Forum	925.00	-	-
Country Roads Women's Group	-	632.00	604.00
Craigavon & Banbridge Women's Aid	-	-	1100.00
Currynierin Women's Action Committee	1,000.00	-	-
Falls Women's Centre	29,972.00	29,493.00	-
Fermanagh Women's Aid	26,937.00	4,485.00	-
Footprints Women's Centre	30,000.00	30,000.00	-
Kilcooley Women's Education & Development Group	1,000.00	1,000.00	-
Lower Andersonstown Mothers Support Group	1,000.00	1,000.00	1,100.00
Mosside Women's Group	1,000.00	910.00	812.00
Newbuildings Women's Group	1,000.00	1,000.00	1,100.00
North Belfast Women's Initiative & Support Project	1,000.00	1,000.00	1,100.00

Community Volunteering Scheme (CVS)/ Small Grants (SG)	2007/08 (CVS) £	2008/09 (CVS) £	2009/10 (SG) £
Old Warren Women in Training	-	-	842.00
Strabane & Lifford Women's Group	1,000.00	1,000.00	1,100.00
Tamlaght Women's Group	-	-	850.00
Women In Agriculture	-	435.00	850.00
Women Of The World	-	-	850.00
Women's Aid Belfast & Lisburn	30,000.00	30,000.00	-
Women's Common Path Network	-	1,000.00	1,000.00

Local Community Fund	2007/08 £	2008/09 £	2009/10* £
Health & Wellbeing For Women In Kinturk	1,000.00	-	-
Hizone Women's Group	5,340.00	5,807.84	-
Link Women's Group	10,168.00	-	-
Newtownabbey Women's Group	8,885.00	19,000.00	-
Newtownards Road Women's Group	11,525.10	2,400.00	-
Newtownstewart Women's Institute	1,200.00	2,071.88	-

* 2009/10 was delivered by local councils and figures for this are not yet available.

Neighbourhood Renewal Investment Fund	2007/08 £	2008/09 £	2009/10 £
Ardoyne Women's Centre	45,567.22	46,968.70	40,296.01
Ballymurphy Women's Centre	88,179.92	87,538.45	85,092.85
Bogside and Brandywell Women's Group	36,182.73	16,780.83	-
Falls Women's Centre	116,947.76	120,839.28	123,014.50
Footprints Women's Centre	157,728.53	182,680.00	121,514.77
Galliagh Women's Group	36,855.72	15,755.90	
Kilcooley Women's Education & Development Group	-	25,152.80	44,777.20
Lenadoon Women's Group	38,575.98	37,372.86	43,169.77
Newtownabbey Women's Group	20,460.00	22,682.76	24,205.68

Neighbourhood Renewal Investment Fund	2007/08 £	2008/09 £	2009/10 £
Newtownards Road Women's Group Ltd	108,007.01	112,678.28	113,804.57
North Belfast Women's Initiative	24,049.96	31,330.68	32,044.68
Omagh Women's Aid	9,227.00	10,710.00	-
Roe Valley Women's Network	20,911.00	-	-
Shankill Women's Centre	125,550.75	167,203.40	140,867.78
Voices Women's Group	30,516.25	33,876.19	34,525.30
Waterside Women's Centre	9,597.63	1,697.08	-
Windsor Women's Centre	96,295.19	75,259.58	82,791.15
Women's News	21,839.90	-	-
Women's Tec	28,320.58	41,183.21	45,292.96

Funding for Women's Groups

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Social Development what funding has been approved by her Department for each women's group for the 2010/11 financial year; and through which programme each group will be funded.

(AQW 6041/10)

Minister for Social Development: Funding awarded by my department to date to women's groups for the 2010/11 financial year is as follows:

Group Name	Funding in 2010/11 £
Community Investment Fund	£
Atlas Women's Centre	67,210.00
Ballybeen Women's Centre	72,012.00
Chrysalis Women's Centre	52,705.00
First Steps Women's Group	63,534.00
Footprints Women's Centre	72,012.00
Foyle Women's Information Network	48,008.00
Greenway Women's Group	72,012.00
Magherafelt Women's Group	67,191.00
Strathfoyle Women's Activity Group Ltd	67,205.00
The Women's Centre Derry	72,008.71
Waterside Women's Centre	50,888.00
Windsor Women's Centre	67,210.00

Women's Centres Childcare Fund	£
Atlas Women's Centre	47,866.80
Ballybeen Women's Centre	179,564.30
Chrysalis Women's Centre	21,818.62
Falls Women's Centre	53,742.01
First Steps Women's Group	40,526.34
Footprints Women's Centre	109,562.28
Greenway Women's Group	66,108.69
Magherafelt Women's Group	124,831.02
Shankill Women's Centre	50,995.67
Strathfoyle Women's Activity Group Ltd	14,069.44
The Women's Centre Derry	31,211.78
Waterside Women's Centre	36,628.23
Windsor Women's Centre	112,022.76

Regional Infrastructure Programme	£
Women's Centres Regional Partnership	347,545.31

Neighbourhood Renewal Investment Fund	£
Ardoyne Women's Centre	41,343.95
Ballymurphy Women's Centre	78,169.55
Falls Women's Centre	126,176.09
Footprints Women's Centre	124,149.96
Kilcooley Women's Education & Development Group	45,368.80
Lenadoon Women's Group	44,279.88
Newtownabbey Women's Group	24,821.40
Newtownards Road Women's Group Ltd	115,186.08
North Belfast Women's Initiative	32,873.88
Shankill Women's Centre	144,666.15
Voices Women's Group	35,443.44
Windsor Women's Centre	84,334.20
Women's News	56,541.93
Womens Tech	92,669.00

Executive's Prompt Payment Scheme

Mr L Cree asked the Minister for Social Development what action she is taking to ensure that contractors paid by the Housing Association under the Executive's prompt payment scheme are passing on this payment to sub-contractors.

(AQW 6050/10)

Minister for Social Development: The Housing Association Guide states that a prompt payment clause should be included in the Association's conditions of contract to ensure prompt payment by the main contractor to sub-contractors. However, it is not intended that there should be any legal liability on the Associations to enforce the prompt payment provisions in any sub-contract. Any remedy under the sub-contract lies with the sub-contractor and the legislation on payment of debt available.

PSNI Investigation into the Nelson Street Site

Ms C Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the nature of the PSNI investigation into the Nelson Street site.

(AQW 6061/10)

Minister for Social Development: The Housing Executive has already confirmed that the Nelson Street site is part of a wider development opportunity site which is currently the subject of a Planning Application from a private developer for high rise residential accommodation.

The responsibility for the outcome of the current Planning Application rests entirely with the Planning Service. Concerns have been raised about the role of the Housing Executive in the Nelson Street site. The Housing Executive has referred the matter to the PSNI.

Given that these investigations are now ongoing, it would be inappropriate to comment further on the detail of the investigation.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 23 April 2010

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Strategic Investment Board

Mr R McCartney asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what temporary arrangements are being put in place to provide leadership to the Strategic Investment Board following the resignation of the Chief Executive.

(AQO 1015/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister (Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness): The Strategic Investment Board is responsible for making arrangements to cover the vacancy for the Chief Executive post when this arises.

SIB has advised that the Chief Operating Officer will be undertaking the duties of Chief Executive Officer (CEO) pending the appointment of a permanent CEO as soon as possible through open competition.

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Single Farm Payment

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the criteria used to assess Single Farm Payment applications.

(AQW 6052/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms M Gildernew): Applications to the Single Farm Payment (SFP) Scheme must meet the following eligibility criteria:

- The applicant must be a farmer undertaking agricultural activity;
- The applicant must hold SFP entitlements and have eligible agricultural land;
- Any individual field declared to claim payment must be at least 0.1 hectares;
- Land used to support the claim must be at the applicant's disposal on 15 May in the year of the claim.

In return for SFP, farm businesses must maintain all of the agricultural land on the holding in Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition (GAEC) and comply with a number of specific legal requirements known as Statutory Management Requirements (SMRs). These requirements, known as Cross-Compliance, apply for the whole calendar year.

A penalty may be applicable to claims which do not meet the scheme rules or do not comply with the cross compliance requirements.

Single Farm Payment

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many farmers in the East Antrim constituency are currently in receipt of the Single Farm Payment.

(AQW 6053/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: A total of 38,609 potentially eligible applications were submitted under the 2009 Single Farm Payment Scheme. As at 13 April 2010, 37,219 claims had been paid and a further 41 had been determined as not due payment because of the application of penalties under scheme rules.

The Department does not hold Single Farm Payment details on a constituency basis. The data is currently held by county and postcode where known. A list of the total number of applications received and the total number of claims finalised as at 13 April 2010 for each postcode area is attached at Annex A.

Annex A

SFP 2009 – FINALISED CLAIM DETAILS AT 13 APRIL 2010 (BY POSTCODE)

Postcode	Claimed	Paid	Penalised
BT1	24	17	0
BT2	9	3	1
BT3	0	0	0
BT4	29	27	0
BT5	40	39	0
BT6	30	30	0
BT7	11	9	0
BT8	115	106	0
BT9	38	35	1
BT10	6	6	0
BT11	6	6	0
BT12	1	0	0
BT13	4	4	0
BT14	44	41	0
BT15	12	11	0
BT16	42	41	0
BT17	18	18	0
BT18	53	53	0
BT19	79	78	0
BT20	17	16	0
BT21	68	65	0
BT22	463	459	0

Postcode	Claimed	Paid	Penalised
BT23	585	562	0
BT24	594	571	4
BT25	587	565	2
BT26	260	255	1
BT27	298	290	0
BT28	367	354	0
BT29	380	368	3
BT30	887	862	0
BT31	475	467	0
BT32	763	743	1
BT33	145	135	0
BT34	1966	1910	0
BT35	1715	1642	2
BT36	113	108	0
BT37	14	14	0
BT38	196	190	1
BT39	642	632	0
BT40	431	417	0
BT41	701	682	0
BT42	1002	978	0
BT43	469	457	0
BT44	1426	1382	2
BT45	1474	1437	0
BT46	547	537	0
BT47	1112	1071	1
BT48	66	61	0
BT49	457	440	0
BT50	0	0	0
BT51	940	910	1
BT52	162	153	0
BT53	884	866	0
BT54	282	267	0
BT55	31	30	0
BT56	39	37	0

Postcode	Claimed	Paid	Penalised
BT57	201	195	0
BT58	0	0	0
BT59	0	0	0
BT60	1680	1634	1
BT61	485	466	0
BT62	679	662	1
BT63	302	294	0
BT64	0	0	0
BT65	5	4	0
BT66	304	290	0
BT67	338	329	0
BT68	87	86	0
BT69	205	200	0
BT70	1373	1326	1
BT71	1150	1114	2
BT72	0	0	0
BT73	0	0	0
BT74	534	484	4
BT75	299	287	0
BT76	205	195	0
BT77	140	134	0
BT78	1737	1655	4
BT79	1587	1519	2
BT80	1038	1005	4
BT81	558	535	0
BT82	665	631	1
BT83	0	0	0
BT84	0	0	0
BT85	0	0	0
BT86	0	0	0
BT87	0	0	0
BT88	0	0	0
BT89	0	0	0
BT90	0	0	0

Postcode	Claimed	Paid	Penalised
BT91	0	0	0
BT92	1570	1489	1
BT93	1024	977	0
BT94	1013	979	0
No BT Postcode Held	311	272	0
Totals	38609	37219	41

Single Farm Payment

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many farmers in the East Antrim constituency have been found to be violating the terms for receipt of the Single Farm Payment in each of the last three years.

(AQW 6054/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: As at 16 April 2010, a total of 3,405 farm businesses were the subject of a Single Farm Payment (SFP) penalty in 2007. The numbers for 2008 and 2009 are 2,459 and 1,745 respectively. Depending on the level of the discrepancy involved, the application of a penalty may result in no financial adjustment to the claim or a partial or full reduction in the amount payable.

The Department does not hold SFP details on a constituency basis. The data is currently held by county and postcode where known. A list of the total number of farm businesses which were the subject of penalty to their

SFP awards in each of the years 2007, 2008 and 2009, as at 16 April 2010, for each postcode area is attached at Annex A.

Annex A

NUMBERS OF FARM BUSINESSES WHICH HAD A PENALTY APPLIED TO SINGLE FARM PAYMENT AWARDS IN THE 2007 TO 2009 SCHEME YEARS

Postcode	2007	2008	2009
BT1	3	3	1
BT2	2	0	0
BT3	0	0	0
BT4	3	1	0
BT5	3	2	0
BT6	1	3	0
BT7	1	1	0
BT8	9	3	6
BT9	2	3	2
BT10	0	0	0
BT11	0	0	0

Postcode	2007	2008	2009
BT12	1	1	0
BT13	0	0	0
BT14	5	4	1
BT15	2	1	1
BT16	5	3	3
BT17	3	2	0
BT18	1	1	0
BT19	7	6	4
BT20	2	1	0
BT21	4	0	1
BT22	32	23	20
BT23	46	26	15
BT24	37	34	24
BT25	46	35	26
BT26	19	17	14
BT27	21	14	5
BT28	22	14	13
BT29	40	25	11
BT30	105	61	45
BT31	33	21	21
BT32	56	41	30
BT33	11	12	10
BT34	174	127	109
BT35	137	98	85
BT36	8	3	0
BT37	1	1	0
BT38	17	13	6
BT39	60	38	29
BT40	35	26	19
BT41	44	37	27
BT42	70	48	31
BT43	30	22	12
BT44	129	88	63
BT45	128	103	60

Postcode	2007	2008	2009
BT46	40	34	29
BT47	150	111	79
BT48	4	4	3
BT49	50	31	24
BT50	0	0	0
BT51	84	60	43
BT52	13	9	3
BT53	70	47	28
BT54	34	27	25
BT55	1	0	0
BT56	7	3	1
BT57	24	17	18
BT58	0	0	0
BT59	0	0	0
BT60	124	104	90
BT61	37	14	15
BT62	68	29	27
BT63	17	14	9
BT64	0	0	0
BT65	0	1	1
BT66	18	22	13
BT67	23	15	13
BT68	9	8	6
BT69	15	12	9
BT70	111	91	56
BT71	70	61	53
BT72	0	0	0
BT73	0	0	0
BT74	52	43	22
BT75	32	25	12
BT76	19	12	12
BT77	16	7	7
BT78	180	123	85
BT79	188	147	105

Postcode	2007	2008	2009
BT80	81	58	38
BT81	54	45	26
BT82	73	52	33
BT83	0	0	0
BT84	0	0	0
BT85	0	0	0
BT86	0	0	0
BT87	0	0	0
BT88	0	0	0
BT89	0	0	0
BT90	0	0	0
BT91	0	0	0
BT92	144	109	70
BT93	125	92	55
BT94	77	40	30
No BT Postcode Held	40	30	11
Total	3405	2459	1745

Assistance to Sheep Farmers

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what assistance her Department is able to provide to sheep farmers who have lost lambs during the recent bad weather. **(AQW 6066/10)**

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: I am fully aware of the impact the recent severe weather has had here and I sympathise with farmers who are understandably distressed.

The Department has issued practical advice to help minimise losses particularly in regard to ewes with young lambs. Sheep farmers seeking practical advice to minimise losses as a result of the poor weather were advised to contact their local DARD Development Adviser.

There are currently no financial support measures available for farmers' losses due to the severe weather, and my Department is currently facing significant financial resource pressures, across the board. However, with Executive Colleagues' approval I recently met with the DFP Minister to discuss hardship funding in respect of crops damaged by severe weather in January 2010. During the course of the meeting I outlined the initial outcome of the recent crop damage assessment exercise and took the opportunity to raise the difficulties facing sheep farmers. We had a discussion on the problems faced by these farmers and how these might be addressed. At the Executive meeting on Thursday 15 April I brought the matter to the attention of Executive colleagues and secured agreement that a bid could be brought forward in the June monitoring round.

In the meantime, I have asked my officials to consider positively any individual requests for force majeure to avoid losses of LFA payments because of lamb or sheep fatalities that have resulted in the farm stocking level falling below the required minimum stocking density. Farmers need to set out their particular circumstances in writing and notify the Department within 10 days of being in a position to do so.

DARD Office in the Comber/Ballygowan Area

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if she would consider opening a DARD office in the Comber/Ballygowan area, given the large farming community in the area.
(AQW 6067/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: In January 2009, I announced my decision to roll out the DARD Direct one stop shop approach to 12 locations across the north of Ireland. I am confident that 12 offices will meet the needs of the vast majority of farmers and represents value for money. The 12 locations I have selected are, Omagh, Dungannon, Armagh, Newry, Downpatrick, Newtownards, Ballymena, Coleraine, Claudy, Magherafelt, Enniskillen and Central South & East Antrim.

Once the DARD Direct model has been rolled out farmers from the Comber /Ballygowan area can visit the office most convenient for them, which is likely to be Newtownards.

Forestry Service

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline her Department's policies concerning the preservation, enhancement and promotion of historic demesnes under the control and management of the Forestry Service.
(AQW 6105/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: My Department (Forest Service) manages any historic demesnes within its ownership under its policy and strategic objectives, which are published in the NI Forestry Strategy for Sustainability and Growth in 2006. Forest Service has no specific remit for the preservation, enhancement and promotion of historical demesnes, however, it engages with other parties with interests in historical demesnes.

Reservoirs, Dams and Millponds

Mrs N Long asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what work is being undertaken by her Department to identify which is the competent authority to oversee the safety and maintenance of (i) reservoirs; (ii) dams; and (iii) millponds and to manage the risks associated with them.
(AQW 6213/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Reservoir safety was identified as a policy gap in the government endorsed policy framework document "Living with Rivers & the Sea" which recommended the need to take forward appropriate legislation to provide for regulatory control. Work carried out by my department associated with the EC Floods Directive has confirmed that flood risk from this source needs to be effectively managed. Consideration is currently being given to the statutory mechanisms that are available to progress the issue of reservoir regulation and my officials are in discussion with other departments to determine how this will be taken forward.

Reservoirs, Dams and Millponds

Mrs N Long asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (i) to detail the number of (a) reservoirs; (b) dams; and (c) millponds in Northern Ireland; (ii) how many of each are under the responsibility of a Government Department; and (iii) for how many of each of the remainder is the owner or responsible agent known.
(AQW 6214/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The Preliminary Flood Risk Assessment for the north of Ireland, as required by the Water Environment (Floods Directive) Regulations (NI) 2009, identified that there are 156 impoundments which are in excess of 10,000m³. "Impoundments" is the term used to describe all retained water bodies including reservoirs, dams, and mill ponds.

Approximately one third of the impoundments are under the responsibility of a Government Department. Ownership and responsibility for the remainder has not been determined as it was not required for completion of the Preliminary Flood Risk Assessment.

Single Farm Payments

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for the cost of processing Single Farm Payments last year.

(AQW 6223/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The Single Farm Payment Scheme costs approximately £9m per year to administer.

Single Farm Payment

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many people in the (i) Larne; (ii) Carrickfergus; and (iii) Newtownabbey areas are in receipt of the Single Farm Payment.

(AQW 6236/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: A total of 38,609 potentially eligible applications were submitted under the 2009 Single Farm Payment Scheme. As at 13 April 2010, 37,219 claims had been paid and a further 41 had been determined as not due payment because of the application of penalties under scheme rules.

The Department does not hold Single Farm Payment details on a town area basis. The data is currently held by county and postcode where known. A list of the total number of applications received and the total number of claims finalised as at 13 April 2010 for each postcode area is attached at Annex A.

Annex A

SFP 2009 – FINALISED CLAIM DETAILS AT 13 APRIL 2010 (BY POSTCODE)

Postcode	Claimed	Paid	Penalised
BT1	24	17	0
BT2	9	3	1
BT3	0	0	0
BT4	29	27	0
BT5	40	39	0
BT6	30	30	0
BT7	11	9	0
BT8	115	106	0
BT9	38	35	1
BT10	6	6	0
BT11	6	6	0
BT12	1	0	0
BT13	4	4	0
BT14	44	41	0
BT15	12	11	0
BT16	42	41	0
BT17	18	18	0

Postcode	Claimed	Paid	Penalised
BT18	53	53	0
BT19	79	78	0
BT20	17	16	0
BT21	68	65	0
BT22	463	459	0
BT23	585	562	0
BT24	594	571	4
BT25	587	565	2
BT26	260	255	1
BT27	298	290	0
BT28	367	354	0
BT29	380	368	3
BT30	887	862	0
BT31	475	467	0
BT32	763	743	1
BT33	145	135	0
BT34	1966	1910	0
BT35	1715	1642	2
BT36	113	108	0
BT37	14	14	0
BT38	196	190	1
BT39	642	632	0
BT40	431	417	0
BT41	701	682	0
BT42	1002	978	0
BT43	469	457	0
BT44	1426	1382	2
BT45	1474	1437	0
BT46	547	537	0
BT47	1112	1071	1
BT48	66	61	0
BT49	457	440	0
BT50	0	0	0
BT51	940	910	1

Postcode	Claimed	Paid	Penalised
BT52	162	153	0
BT53	884	866	0
BT54	282	267	0
BT55	31	30	0
BT56	39	37	0
BT57	201	195	0
BT58	0	0	0
BT59	0	0	0
BT60	1680	1634	1
BT61	485	466	0
BT62	679	662	1
BT63	302	294	0
BT64	0	0	0
BT65	5	4	0
BT66	304	290	0
BT67	338	329	0
BT68	87	86	0
BT69	205	200	0
BT70	1373	1326	1
BT71	1150	1114	2
BT72	0	0	0
BT73	0	0	0
BT74	534	484	4
BT75	299	287	0
BT76	205	195	0
BT77	140	134	0
BT78	1737	1655	4
BT79	1587	1519	2
BT80	1038	1005	4
BT81	558	535	0
BT82	665	631	1
BT83	0	0	0
BT84	0	0	0
BT85	0	0	0

Postcode	Claimed	Paid	Penalised
BT86	0	0	0
BT87	0	0	0
BT88	0	0	0
BT89	0	0	0
BT90	0	0	0
BT91	0	0	0
BT92	1570	1489	1
BT93	1024	977	0
BT94	1013	979	0
No BT Postcode Held	311	272	0
Totals	38609	37219	41

Single Farm Payments

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many farmers received Single Farm Payments last year; and the total amount allocated.

(AQW 6276/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: A total of 38,609 potentially eligible applications were submitted under the 2009 Single Farm Payment Scheme. As at 13 April 2010, 37,219 claims had been paid and a further 41 had been determined as not due payment because of the application of penalties under scheme rules. The total value of these payments is £282 millions.

Single Farm Payment

Mr G Campbell asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many farmers in the East Londonderry constituency are currently in receipt of the Single Farm Payment.

(AQW 6277/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: A total of 38,609 potentially eligible applications were submitted under the 2009 Single Farm Payment Scheme. As at 13 April 2010, 37,219 claims had been paid and a further 41 had been determined as not due payment because of the application of penalties under scheme rules.

The Department does not hold Single Farm Payment details on a constituency basis. The data is currently held by county and postcode where known. A list of the total number of applications received and the total number of claims finalised as at 13 April 2010 for each postcode area in Northern Ireland is attached at Annex A

Annex A

2009 SINGLE FARM PAYMENT – FINALISED CLAIM DETAILS AT 13 APRIL 2010 (BY POSTCODE)

Postcode	Claimed	Paid	Penalised
BT1	24	17	0
BT2	9	3	1

Postcode	Claimed	Paid	Penalised
BT3	0	0	0
BT4	29	27	0
BT5	40	39	0
BT6	30	30	0
BT7	11	9	0
BT8	115	106	0
BT9	38	35	1
BT10	6	6	0
BT11	6	6	0
BT12	1	0	0
BT13	4	4	0
BT14	44	41	0
BT15	12	11	0
BT16	42	41	0
BT17	18	18	0
BT18	53	53	0
BT19	79	78	0
BT20	17	16	0
BT21	68	65	0
BT22	463	459	0
BT23	585	562	0
BT24	594	571	4
BT25	587	565	2
BT26	260	255	1
BT27	298	290	0
BT28	367	354	0
BT29	380	368	3
BT30	887	862	0
BT31	475	467	0
BT32	763	743	1
BT33	145	135	0
BT34	1966	1910	0
BT35	1715	1642	2
BT36	113	108	0

Postcode	Claimed	Paid	Penalised
BT37	14	14	0
BT38	196	190	1
BT39	642	632	0
BT40	431	417	0
BT41	701	682	0
BT42	1002	978	0
BT43	469	457	0
BT44	1426	1382	2
BT45	1474	1437	0
BT46	547	537	0
BT47	1112	1071	1
BT48	66	61	0
BT49	457	440	0
BT50	0	0	0
BT51	940	910	1
BT52	162	153	0
BT53	884	866	0
BT54	282	267	0
BT55	31	30	0
BT56	39	37	0
BT57	201	195	0
BT58	0	0	0
BT59	0	0	0
BT60	1680	1634	1
BT61	485	466	0
BT62	679	662	1
BT63	302	294	0
BT64	0	0	0
BT65	5	4	0
BT66	304	290	0
BT67	338	329	0
BT68	87	86	0
BT69	205	200	0
BT70	1373	1326	1

Postcode	Claimed	Paid	Penalised
BT71	1150	1114	2
BT72	0	0	0
BT73	0	0	0
BT74	534	484	4
BT75	299	287	0
BT76	205	195	0
BT77	140	134	0
BT78	1737	1655	4
BT79	1587	1519	2
BT80	1038	1005	4
BT81	558	535	0
BT82	665	631	1
BT83	0	0	0
BT84	0	0	0
BT85	0	0	0
BT86	0	0	0
BT87	0	0	0
BT88	0	0	0
BT89	0	0	0
BT90	0	0	0
BT91	0	0	0
BT92	1570	1489	1
BT93	1024	977	0
BT94	1013	979	0
No BT Postcode Held	311	272	0
Totals	38609	37219	41

Single Farm Payment

Mr J Craig asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many farms in the Lagan Valley constituency are currently in receipt of the Single Farm Payment.

(AQW 6354/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: A total of 38,609 potentially eligible applications were submitted under the 2009 Single Farm Payment Scheme. As at 13 April 2010, 37,219 claims had been paid and a further 41 had been determined as not due payment because of the application of penalties under scheme rules.

The Department does not hold Single Farm Payment details on a constituency basis. The data is currently held by county and postcode where known. A list of the total number of applications received

and the total number of claims finalised as at 13 April 2010 for each postcode area is attached at Annex A.

Annex A

2009 SINGLE FARM PAYMENT – FINALISED CLAIM DETAILS AT 13 APRIL 2010 (BY POSTCODE)

Claimed	Postcode	Paid	Penalised
24	BT1	17	0
9	BT2	3	1
0	BT3	0	0
29	BT4	27	0
40	BT5	39	0
30	BT6	30	0
11	BT7	9	0
115	BT8	106	0
38	BT9	35	1
6	BT10	6	0
6	BT11	6	0
1	BT12	0	0
4	BT13	4	0
44	BT14	41	0
12	BT15	11	0
42	BT16	41	0
18	BT17	18	0
53	BT18	53	0
79	BT19	78	0
17	BT20	16	0
68	BT21	65	0
463	BT22	459	0
585	BT23	562	0
594	BT24	571	4
587	BT25	565	2
260	BT26	255	1
298	BT27	290	0
367	BT28	354	0
380	BT29	368	3

Claimed	Postcode	Paid	Penalised
887	BT30	862	0
475	BT31	467	0
763	BT32	743	1
145	BT33	135	0
1966	BT34	1910	0
1715	BT35	1642	2
113	BT36	108	0
14	BT37	14	0
196	BT38	190	1
642	BT39	632	0
431	BT40	417	0
701	BT41	682	0
1002	BT42	978	0
469	BT43	457	0
1426	BT44	1382	2
1474	BT45	1437	0
547	BT46	537	0
1112	BT47	1071	1
66	BT48	61	0
457	BT49	440	0
0	BT50	0	0
940	BT51	910	1
162	BT52	153	0
884	BT53	866	0
282	BT54	267	0
31	BT55	30	0
39	BT56	37	0
201	BT57	195	0
0	BT58	0	0
0	BT59	0	0
1680	BT60	1634	1
485	BT61	466	0
679	BT62	662	1
302	BT63	294	0

Claimed	Postcode	Paid	Penalised
0	BT64	0	0
5	BT65	4	0
304	BT66	290	0
338	BT67	329	0
87	BT68	86	0
205	BT69	200	0
1373	BT70	1326	1
1150	BT71	1114	2
0	BT72	0	0
0	BT73	0	0
534	BT74	484	4
299	BT75	287	0
205	BT76	195	0
140	BT77	134	0
1737	BT78	1655	4
1587	BT79	1519	2
1038	BT80	1005	4
558	BT81	535	0
665	BT82	631	1
0	BT83	0	0
0	BT84	0	0
0	BT85	0	0
0	BT86	0	0
0	BT87	0	0
0	BT88	0	0
0	BT89	0	0
0	BT90	0	0
0	BT91	0	0
1570	BT92	1489	1
1024	BT93	977	0
1013	BT94	979	0
311	No BT Postcode Held	272	0
38609	Totals	37219	41

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

Windsor Railway Halt, South Belfast

Mr A Maskey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what consultation or contact his Department has had with the Department for Regional Development in relation to the extension or relocation of the Windsor railway halt, in light of the proposed development of Windsor Park, South Belfast.

(AQW 6100/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr N McCausland): My Department has not consulted the Department for Regional Development in relation to the extension or relocation of the Windsor railway halt, in light of the proposed development of Windsor Park.

Consultants have been commissioned through Sport NI to produce an Outline Business Case (OBC) for Stadium Development in Northern Ireland. Once the OBC is finalised and the preferred option for football agreed, as with any major build or alteration of existing premises there will be planning, traffic management and other issues to be considered. This will require the involvement of other Departments and the statutory authorities on associated access/infrastructure requirements.

The Legacy of the Titanic in 2012-13

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what plans his Department or any of its agencies have to celebrate the legacy of the Titanic in 2012/13.

(AQW 6116/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: My Department, through its associated arms length bodies plans to celebrate the legacy of the Titanic in 2012-13 in the following ways:

- The Arts Council of Northern Ireland has awarded £25,000 to the Titanic Festival, scheduled to take place in April 2012. This will fund the commissioning of new art work to mark the centenary, including a Requiem for the Titanic;
- The Arts Council has also allocated £10,000 towards the commissioning of a major play by Owen McCafferty for the Ulster Bank Festival at Queens 2012. The play is based on the transcripts of survivors of the Titanic.
- National Museums Northern Ireland is actively developing a programme of exhibitions and events to coincide with key Titanic centenary anniversaries in 2011-12. These will include a mix of permanent and temporary exhibitions at the Ulster Folk & Transport Museum, the Ulster Museum and the Ulster American Folk Park and a programme of events at all three sites. All of these initiatives are subject to normal approval procedures.
- This programme of exhibitions and events will be underpinned by National Museums' unique collections relating to Titanic and wider maritime and industrial history. National Museums Northern Ireland already provides a dedicated Titanic Website <http://www.titanicinbelfast.com/welcome.aspx> which will be developed and refreshed as part of its public programming.

Furthermore, a DCAL Project Steering Group has been established to develop a strategy to commemorate 400th and 100th anniversaries that occur in the period 2010 to 2022. The work of the group is at a very early stage and my Department will work closely with other departments on celebrations around the Titanic anniversary.

I trust you will find this information useful.

The Legacy of the Titanic in 2012-13

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much funding has been allocated to allow his Department or any of its agencies to (i) plan for; and (ii) promote the celebration of the legacy of the Titanic in 2012/13.

(AQW 6117/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: No detailed funding has yet been allocated to projects beyond the budget year 2010/11 however you may wish to note that organisations supported by DCAL plan to celebrate the legacy of the Titanic in 2012-13 in the following ways:

- The Arts Council of Northern Ireland is supporting the Titanic Festival with funds in the region of £25k, scheduled to take place in April 2012. This will fund the commissioning of new art work to mark the centenary, including a Requiem for the Titanic;
- The Arts Council is also contributing £10,000 towards the commissioning of a major play by Owen McCafferty for the Ulster Bank Festival at Queens 2012. The play is based on the transcripts of survivors of the Titanic.
- National Museums Northern Ireland is actively developing a programme of exhibitions and events to coincide with key Titanic centenary anniversaries in 2011-12. These will include a mix of permanent and temporary exhibitions at the Ulster Folk & Transport Museum, the Ulster Museum and the Ulster American Folk Park and a programme of events at all three sites. All of these initiatives are subject to normal approval procedures.
- This programme of exhibitions and events will be underpinned by National Museums' unique collections relating to Titanic and wider maritime and industrial history. National Museums Northern Ireland already provides a dedicated Titanic Website <http://www.titanicinbelfast.com/welcome.aspx> which will be developed and refreshed as part of its public programming.

I trust you will find this information useful.

Library Headquarters

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure if he has had any discussions with the relevant parties concerning locating the new library headquarters in Lisburn instead of Ballynahinch. (AQW 6159/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I have had no discussions with any party regarding the location for Libraries NI's corporate (headquarters) functions.

The Libraries NI Board has responsibility for deciding on the location for its corporate functions and it would be inappropriate for me to intervene in this operational issue.

No final decision has been taken by the Libraries NI Board on the future location for its corporate functions.

Library Headquarters

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what consideration he has given to the effect on tourism of moving the Library Headquarters from the historical town of Ballynahinch to Lisburn. (AQW 6202/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The Libraries NI Board has responsibility for deciding on the location for its corporate (headquarters) functions and it would be inappropriate for me to intervene in this operational issue.

I understand that no final decision has been taken by the Libraries NI Board on the location for its corporate functions. It is for this Board to consider whether there is any potential material effect on tourism.

In due course, I will be briefed by my officials on the Board's plan of action.

Library Headquarters

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what consideration he has given to the savings that could be made if the Library Headquarters were to remain in Ballynahinch instead of being moved to Lisburn.

(AQW 6204/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The Libraries NI Board has responsibility for deciding on the future location for its corporate (headquarters) functions and it would be inappropriate for me to intervene in this operational issue.

I understand that no final decision has been taken by the Libraries NI Board on the location for its corporate functions. The Board will consider any potential savings in the decision making process.

In due course, I will be briefed by my officials on the Board's plan of action.

Library Headquarters

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline the projected cost of the movement of book and artefact collections from Ballynahinch Library Headquarters to the three other proposed locations.

(AQW 6272/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The public consultation on Libraries NI's proposal to close the former SEELB Library Headquarters at Ballynahinch ended on 16 March 2010. I understand that Libraries NI are considering the responses to this consultation. No final decision has yet been taken.

Libraries NI have considered the implications of relocating the collections currently housed in this building. They estimate that the costs will be minimal.

Department of Education

GCSE and A Level Questions in Irish

Mr J Wells asked the Minister of Education what percentage of pupils in Irish-medium schools, when given the option, chose to answer GCSE and 'A' Level questions in Irish for non-Irish-language exams.

(AQW 6045/10)

Minister of Education (Ms C Ruane): Tairgeann an Chomhairle Curaclaim, Scrúdúcháin agus Mheasúnaithe (CCSM), mar fhoras cáiliúcháin, aistriúcháin Ghaeilge ar a n-ábhair scrúdaithe agus mheasúnaithe agus féadann sí iad a mharcáil agus a ghrádú dá réir sin. Cé is moite de Bhéarla agus Litríocht an Bhéarla ag GCSE agus Litríocht an Bhéarla ag Ardleibhéal, a chaithfear a ghlacadh trí mheán an Bhéarla, féadann Gaelscoileanna leas a bhaint as roinnt de cháilíochtaí CCEA nó as gach cáilíocht CCEA agus iarraidh ar aistriúcháin ar ábhair ghaolmhara.

The Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA), as an awarding body, offers Irish translations of its examination and assessment materials and can mark and grade them accordingly. With the exception of GCSEs in English and English Literature and A level English Literature, all of which must be taken through the medium of English, Irish-medium schools can avail of any or all CCEA qualifications and request translations of related materials.

In the Summer 2009 examination series, Irish-medium post-primary school pupils entered for CCEA's GCSE and A level qualifications (other than English or English Literature) answered the examination questions through the medium of Irish. It is not possible to provide the information requested in relation to pupils in Irish-medium post-primary units.

Staff:Pupil Ratio in Irish-Medium and Integrated Schools

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister of Education to detail the current staff:pupil ratio, in each school year, in (i) each Irish-medium school; and (ii) each integrated school.

(AQW 6090/10)

Minister of Education: Ní choinníonn an Roinn eolas ar chóimheas daltaí-múinteoirí do blianta scoile aonair. Leagann na táblaí thíos na cóimheasa iomlána daltaí-múinteoirí, sa bhliain 2008-2009, do (i) gach Gaelscoil agus (ii) gach scoil chomhtháite.

The Department does not hold information to allow the pupil:teacher ratio for individual school years to be calculated. The tables below sets out the overall pupil:teacher ratios, in 2008-2009, for (i) each Irish-medium school and (ii) each integrated school.

PUPIL:TEACHER RATIOS, 2008-2009

(i) Irish-medium schools			(ii) Integrated schools		
(i) (a) Irish-medium primary schools		Pupil: Teacher Ratio	(ii) (a) Integrated primary schools		Pupil: Teacher Ratio
Bunscoil an tSleibhe Dhuibh	Belfast	18.7	Cranmore Integrated Primary School	Belfast	21.9
Bunscoil Bheann Mhadagain	Belfast	14.1	Hazelwood Primary School	Newtown-abbey	21.2
Bunscoil Mhic Reachtain	Belfast	15.8	Enniskillen Integrated Primary School	Enniskillen	21.2
Bunscoil Phobal Feirste	Belfast	17.0	Oakgrove Integrated Primary School	Derry	18.6
Gaelscoil an Lonnain	Belfast	14.1	Omagh Integrated Primary School	Omagh	16.4
Gaelscoil na bhFál	Belfast	15.3	Roe Valley Integrated Primary School	Limavady	20.8
Gaelscoil na Mona	Belfast	17.2	Acorn Integrated Primary School	Carrickfergus	22.5
Scoil an Droichid	Belfast	14.2	Braidside Integrated Primary School	Ballymena	22.5
Bunscoil an Traonaigh	Lisnaskea	10.3	Corran Integrated Primary School	Larne	19.5
Bunscoil Cholmcille	Derry	20.1	Maine Integrated Primary School	Randalstown	20.3
Gaelscoil Eadain Mhoir	Derry	21.3	Millstrand Integrated Primary School	Portrush	17.7
Gaelscoil na gCrann	Omagh	12.5	Spires Integrated Primary School	Magherafelt	23.3
Gaelscoil Uí Dhochartaigh	Strabane	18.7	Cedar Integrated Primary School	Crossgar	24.0
Bunscoil an Chaistil	Ballycastle	15.4	Drumlins Integrated Primary School	Ballynahinch	16.6

(i) Irish-medium schools		
(i) (a) Irish-medium primary schools		Pupil: Teacher Ratio
Gaelscoil Eanna	Newtown-abbey	13.0
Gaelscoil Ghleann Darach	Crumlin	15.0
Gaelscoil na Spéiríní	Magherafelt	12.0
Bunscoil Bheanna Boirche	Castlewellan	14.5
Scoil na Fuisgeoige	Belfast	13.8
Bunscoil an Iuir	Newry	20.8
Gaelscoil Uí Neill	Coalisland	15.8
Primary Irish medium sector average		16.3

(ii) Integrated schools		
(ii) (a) Integrated primary schools		Pupil: Teacher Ratio
Loughview Integrated Primary School	Belfast	21.8
Millennium Integrated Primary School	Saintfield	20.3
Oakwood Integrated Primary School	Belfast	22.2
Rowandale Integrated Primary School	Moirá	11.3
Bridge Integrated Primary School	Banbridge	23.5
Phoenix Integrated Primary School	Cookstown	16.4
Portadown Integrated Primary School	Portadown	24.7
Saints & Scholars Integrated Primary School	Armagh	18.4
Windmill Integrated Primary School	Dungannon	21.9
Primary integrated sector average		20.6

PUPIL:TEACHER RATIOS, 2008-2009

(i) (b) Irish-medium post-primary schools		Pupil: Teacher Ratio
Colaiste Feirste	Belfast	11.3

(ii) (b) Integrated post-primary schools		Pupil: Teacher Ratio
Hazelwood College	Newtown-abbey	14.5
Malone Integrated College	Belfast	14.0
Drumragh College	Omagh	15.1
Erne Integrated College	Enniskillen	12.2
Oakgrove Integrated College	Derry	14.4
North Coast Integrated College	Coleraine	11.6
Slemish College	Ballymena	14.6
Sperrin Integrated College	Magherafelt	12.4
Ulidia Integrated College	Carrickfergus	13.3
Blackwater Integrated College	Downpatrick	10.4
Lagan College	Belfast	15.5
Shimna Integrated College	Newcastle	12.9

(i) (b) Irish-medium post-primary schools		Pupil: Teacher Ratio
Post-primary Irish-medium sector average		11.3

(ii) (b) Integrated post-primary schools		Pupil: Teacher Ratio
Strangford Integrated College	Carrowdore	14.5
Armagh Integrated College	Armagh	7.1
Integrated College Dungannon	Dungannon	13.6
New-Bridge Integrated College	Banbridge	14.4
Post-primary integrated sector average		13.7

Whitehouse Primary School, Newtownabbey

Mr M Storey asked the Minister of Education for an update on the provision of a newbuild for Whitehouse Primary School, Newtownabbey.

(AQW 6095/10)

Minister of Education: Beidh a fhios agat go bhfuil an t-athbhreithniú ar gach tionscadal ollchaipitil, lena n-áirítear an ceann sin do Whitehouse Primary School, ar siúl go fóill agus tá mo chuid feidhmeannach ag obair chun an próiseas a chríochnú. Mar gheall ar an tábhacht a bhaineann leis an tasc seo, áfach, is riachtanach go mbailítear fianaise láidir agus go dtugtar lánbhreithniú do gach tionscadal, sula ndéantar aon chinneadh. Cé go n-aithním na himthosca dúshlánacha sa chás seo agus i mórán cásanna eile, níl mé in ann dátaí sonracha le haghaidh chríochnú an athbhreithnithe nó le haghaidh dhul chun cinn aon scéime ar leith sa toadhacháil a thabhairt faoi láthair.

You will be aware that the review of all proposed major capital work projects, including that for Whitehouse Primary School, is ongoing and my officials are working to complete the process. Given the importance of this task, however, it is essential that robust evidence is collated and that full consideration is given to each project, before a decision is taken. While I recognise the challenging circumstances in this case and in many others, I am not in a position at present to give specific dates for completion of the review or future progress of any particular scheme.

Community Alternative Education Provision

Ms J McCann asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 5610/10, what plans she has for the 2010/11 academic year for community alternative education provision currently funded by the Belfast Education and Library Board.

(AQW 6098/10)

Minister of Education: The best place for children and young people to be educated is in school. It is recognised, however, that for some young people a school placement cannot be sustained and that some form of alternative education provision may be necessary to meet their educational and other needs. Responsibility for making provision, for these young people, rests with the relevant Education and Library Board.

Soláthraítear maoiniú le haghaidh oideachas malartach do na Boird Oideachais agus Leabharlainne agus tá sé de dhualgas orthu a chinneadh cén chaoi is fearr a n-úsáidfear é seo chun riachtanais na ndaoine óga ina gceantair a bhaint amach. Féadann Boird, mar a tharla i limistéar Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne Bhéal Feirste (BOLBF), trácht ar shocruithe comhpháirtíochta a bhunú le hearnáil an phobail nó áiteanna i soláthar reatha atá bunaithe sa cheantar a cheannach.

Funding is provided to the Education and Library Boards for alternative education and it is for them to decide how this can be used to best meet the needs of the young people in their area. Boards can, as

is the case in the Belfast Education and Library Board (BELB) area, consider entering into partnership arrangements with the community sector or to purchase places in existing community based provision.

It is therefore a matter for the BELB to take forward, not the Department of Education.

Schools' Capital Budgets

Lord Browne asked the Minister of Education to detail her Department's contribution to the capital budgets of (i) controlled primary schools; (ii) Catholic maintained primary schools; and (iii) Irish-medium primary schools in each of the last five years.

(AQW 6099/10)

Minister of Education: Seo a leanas an caiteachas caipitil ar scoileanna Rialaithe, scoileanna Caitliceacha faoi Chothabháil agus Gaelscoileanna i ngach bliain de na cúig bliana a chuaigh thart:

Capital expenditure on Controlled, Catholic Maintained and Irish-Medium schools in each of the last five years was as follows:

Primary School Sector	2004/05 (£000s)	2005/06 (£000s)	2006/07 (£000s)	2007/08 (£000s)	2008/09 (£000s)
Controlled	26,021	30,938	32,005	26,154	33,271
Catholic Maintained	18,905	17,807	15,583	16,501	18,267
Irish Medium	1,280	212	78	148	556

Newbuild for Lurgan College

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 5584/10, what steps she has taken to ensure that the policy framework and statutory obligations are in place to complete the area based planning process for the newbuild for Lurgan College.

(AQW 6110/10)

Minister of Education: I dtaca le Pleanáil de réir Ceantair, leag Páipéar Polasaí 22 RPA amach an cur chuige ardleibhéil polasaí le glacadh leis. Beidh lánfhreagracht ar an Údarás um Oideachas agus Scileanna, nuair a bhunófar é, as pleanáil an eastáit laistigh den chreat straitéiseach agus polasaí atá leagtha ag an RO agus, mar sin de, as pleananna de réir ceantair a thabhairt ar aghaidh.

In relation to Area Based Planning, RPA Policy Paper 22 set out the high level policy approach to be adopted. The Education and Skills Authority, when established, will have overall responsibility for planning of the estate within the policy and strategic framework set by DE and thus for bringing forward area-based plans.

In the interim period, my Department is working closely with all school managing authorities to develop a strategic approach to planning throughout the north of Ireland. All projects will be examined within the wider policy framework and for post-primary school particular emphasis will be placed on the potential to deliver the Entitlement Framework.

In the Craigavon area, my Department has asked the SELB to review the capital investment needs of Lurgan College, within the wider context of delivery of the Entitlement Framework by all schools, with the view to bringing forward a strategic plan for the whole area. The plan is awaited.

Funding for Preparatory Schools

Ms A Lo asked the Minister of Education for an estimate of the potential savings to be made by her Department through the withdrawal of funding for preparatory school places.

(AQW 6136/10)

Minister of Education: Mar is eol duit, thug mo Roinn údarás do Sheirbhís Comhairleachta Gnó na Roinne Airgeadais agus Pearsanra, i mí Eanáir 2009, chun athbhreithniú a dhéanamh go neamhspleách ar an mhaoiniú do rannóga ullmhúcháin tar éis na moltaí i dTuirisc Bain agus chun tuairisc a sholáthar ar a cuid torthaí. Bhain a Tuairisc, a tugadh dom i mí Mheán Fómhair 2009, de thátaí as gur cheart don Roinn maoiniú na rannóga ullmhúcháin a tharraingt siar mar gheall ar chomhionannas rochtana.

As you know my Department commissioned the Business Consultancy Service of the Department of Finance and Personnel, in January 2009, to independently undertake a review of the funding to preparatory departments following on from recommendations in the Bain Report and to provide a report of their findings. Their Report, which was provided to me in September 2009, concluded that the Department should consider the withdrawal of funding to preparatory departments on the basis of equality of access.

This recommendation was in line with the view of the Equality Commission, which stated in its document “Every Child an Equal Child” that a key component of a quality education system is the provision of equality of access to good education.

However, before reaching a decision on this recommendation, I asked for an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) to be carried out under Section 75 of the 1998 NI Act. The EQIA consultation closed on 4 March 2010 and I am giving conscientious consideration to the responses received to this consultation prior to making my decision.

The proposal to withdraw funding from preparatory departments is on the basis of equality of access and not a financial matter.

Funding for Preparatory Schools

Ms A Lo asked the Minister of Education what consideration she has given to the continuation of funding for those pupils currently in preparatory schools and the cessation of funding for new preparatory school places, as opposed to a complete withdrawal of funding in September 2010.
(AQW 6137/10)

Minister of Education: Mar is eol duit, tar éis molta i dTuirisc Bain maidir le hathbhreithniú a dhéanamh ar an réasúnacht taobh thiar de rannóga ullmhúcháin a mhaoiniú, choimisiúnaigh mo Roinn athbhreithniú neamhspleách a mhol gur cheart don Roinn breithmheas a thabhairt do mhaoiniú na rannóga ullmhúcháin a tharraingt siar mar gheall ar chomhionannas rochtana.

As you know, following a recommendation in the Bain Report about reviewing the rationale for funding preparatory departments, my Department commissioned an independent report which recommended that consideration should be given to the withdrawal of funding to preparatory departments on the basis of equality of access.

However, before reaching a decision on this recommendation, I asked for an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) to be carried out under Section 75 of the 1998 NI Act. The EQIA consultation closed on 4 March 2010 and generated a significant response.

I am giving conscientious consideration to the responses received to this consultation prior to making my decision. Some of the responses received touched on similar issues to those included in your question and as such these will be considered as part of my deliberations

School Boards of Governors

Mr R McCartney asked the Minister of Education what measures are in place to address the long-term non-attendance of members of school Boards of Governors.
(AQW 6147/10)

Minister of Education: Déanann an scéim um bainistíocht do gach scoil dheontaschúnta foráil maidir le ball den Bhord Gobharnóirí a dhícháiliú ar bhonn neamhfhreastail leanúnaigh, mar seo a leanas:

The scheme of management for each grant-aided school makes provision to disqualify a member of the Board of Governors on the basis of continuous absence as follows:

'Where a voting or co-opted member is absent from 3 consecutive meetings of the Board of Governors, or for 6 months consecutively, whichever is the greater period, the secretary shall report the matter at the next meeting, and unless the Board of Governors is satisfied that her/his failure to attend was occasioned by illness or other unavoidable cause, the member shall be deemed to have resigned her/his membership and shall cease to be a member.'

Review of Capital Projects

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister of Education to outline the completion framework for the review of capital projects; and the number of projects subject to this review.

(AQW 6156/10)

Minister of Education: Tá an t-athbhreithniú caipitil ar siúl go fóill agus tá mo chuid feidhmeannach ag obair chun an próiseas a chríochnú. Mar gheall ar an tábhacht a bhaineann leis an tasc seo, áfach, is riachtanach go mbailítear fianaise láidir agus go dtugtar lánbhreithniú do gach tionscadal, sula ndéantar aon chinneadh. Níl mé in ann dátaí sonracha le haghaidh chríochnú an athbhreithnithe seo a thabhairt faoi láthair, ach aithním go gcaithfear an obair a dhéanamh go gasta.

The capital review is ongoing and my officials are working to complete the process. Given the importance of this task, however, it is essential that robust evidence is collated and that full consideration is given to each project, before a decision is taken. I am not in a position at present to give specific dates for completion of this review however I recognise that this work needs to be carried out expeditiously.

All potential major capital works projects will be subject to review.

Post-primary Schools

Ms D Purvis asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the number of post-primary schools in each Education and Library Board Area that are below the minimum enrolment of 500; and (ii) the number of post-primary schools closed down in each Education and Library Board area since 2007.

(AQW 6174/10)

Minister of Education: The information requested is detailed in the table below.

POST-PRIMARY SCHOOLS WITH FEWER THAN 500 PUPILS¹ BY ELB, 2009/10 AND SCHOOL CLOSURES FROM 2007

ELB	No of schools below the threshold enrolment	No of schools closed since 2007	No of schools closed since 2007 due to amalgamation
BELB	8	4	0
WELB	24	1	0
NEELB	21	1	3 forming 1
SEELB	18	3	0
SELB	22	1	0
TOTAL	93	10	3 forming 1

Source: School census.

Note:

1. The enrolment threshold relates to 500 pupils in Years 8 – 12. This is equivalent to 100 pupils in each year group for Junior Highs (Years 8 – 10) and for Senior Highs (Years 11 – 12).
2. The figures provided include two or more schools amalgamating to form one school.

Cuimsítear an tairseach rollaithe de 500 dalta do Bhlianta 8-12 (méid is ionann le 100 dalta in aghaidh an bhliainghrúpa) i mBeartas um Scoileanna Inbhuanaithe de chuid na Roinne, a shonraíonn sé chritéar le húsáid in inmharthanacht scoile a mheas, Ní druidtear scoileanna go huathoibríoch má thiteann rolluithe faoi na tairseacha sin, ach cfortar iad ar bhonn cás go cás i gcoinne na sraithe critéar atá leagtha amach sa bheartas sin. Is í an tsaincheist is tábhachtaí ná caighdeán an oideachais a sholáthraítear.

The enrolment threshold of 500 for Years 8 – 12 (equivalent to 100 per year group) is included in the department's Sustainable Schools Policy which specifies six criteria to be used in assessing a school's educational viability. Schools are not closed automatically if enrolments fall under the thresholds, but rather are considered on a case-by-case basis against the full set of criteria set out in the policy. The overriding consideration is the quality of education provided.

Development Proposals

Ms D Purvis asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of development proposals agreed across the controlled, maintained, integrated and Irish-medium sectors since 2007.
(AQW 6176/10)

Minister of Education: Faomhadh 78 togra forbartha ó 1 Eánair 2007. Mionsonraíonn an tábla thíos líon na gceaduithe de réir eanála.

A total of 78 development proposals have been approved since 1 January 2007. The table below details the number of approvals according to sector.

Sector	Controlled	Maintained	Grant-maintained Integrated (GMI)	Irish-medium
Number of Development Proposals Approved	45	16	5	12

Bangor Central Integrated Primary School

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Education what plans she has to provide additional accommodation for Bangor Central Integrated Primary School.
(AQW 6186/10)

Minister of Education: Beidh a fhios agat go bhfuil an t-athbhreithniú ar gach tionscadal molta ollchaipitil, lena n-áirítear an ceann sin do Bangor Central Integrated Primary School, ar siúl go fóill agus tá mo chuid feidhmeannach ag obair chun an próiseas a chríochnú. Mar gheall ar an tábhacht a bhaineann leis an tasc seo, áfach, is riachtanach go mbailítear fianaise láidir agus go dtugtar lánbhreithniú do gach tionscadal, sula ndéantar aon chinneadh. Níl mé in ann, mar sin, sonraí a thabhairt faoi láthair ar amscála i leith an fhoignimh mholta nua do Bangor Central Integrated Primary School.

You will be aware that the review of all proposed major capital work projects, including that for Bangor Central Integrated Primary School, is ongoing and my officials are working to complete the process. Given the importance of this task, however, it is essential that robust evidence is collated and that full consideration is given to each project, before a decision is taken. I am not, therefore, in a position at present to give details of a timescale for the proposed new-build for Bangor Central Integrated Primary School.

Bunscoil Bheann Mhadagáin, North Belfast

Ms C Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Education to provide an update on the new-build for Bunscoil Bheann Mhadagáin, North Belfast.
(AQW 6192/10)

Minister of Education: D'fhaomh mo Roinn Breithmheas Eacnamaíochta do scéim fhéideartha um oibreacha ollchaipitil le haghaidh Bhunscoil Bheann Madagáin. Beidh a fhios agat, áfach, go bhfuil an t-athbhreithniú ar gach tionscadal ollchaipitil, lena n-áirítear an ceann sin do Bhunscoil Bheann Mhadagáin, ar siúl go fóill agus tá mo chuid feidhmeannach ag obair chun an próiseas a chríochnú. Mar gheall ar an tábhacht a bhaineann leis an tásc seo, áfach, is riachtanach go mbailítear fianaise láidir agus go dtugtar lánbhreithniú do gach tionscadal, sula ndéantar aon chinneadh. Cé go n-aithním na himthosca dúshlánacha sa chás seo agus i mórán cásanna eile, níl mé in ann dátaí sonracha le haghaidh chríochnú an athbhreithnithe nó le haghaidh dhul chun cinn aon scéime ar leith sa todhchaí a thabhairt faoi láthair.

My Department has recently approved an Economic Appraisal for the potential major capital works scheme for Bunscoil Bheann Mhadagáin. However you will be aware that the review of all proposed major capital work projects, including that for Bunscoil Bheann Mhadagáin, is ongoing and my officials are working to complete the process. Given the importance of this task it is essential that robust evidence is collated and that full consideration is given to each project, before a decision is taken. While I recognise the challenging circumstances in this case and in many others, I am not in a position at present to give specific dates for completion of the review or future progress of any particular scheme.

Area-based Planning

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister of Education whether she has set deadlines for the delivery of Area based Planning in the Lurgan and Portadown areas and if any of these deadlines have been breached. **(AQW 6197/10)**

Minister of Education: I dtaca le Pleanáil de réir Ceantair, leag Páipéar Polasaí 22 RPA amach an cur chuige ardleibhéil polasaí le glacadh leis. Beidh lánfhreagracht ar an Údarás um Oideachas agus Scileanna, nuair a bhunófar é, as pleanáil an eastáit laistigh den chreat straitéiseach agus polasaí atá leagtha ag an RO agus, mar sin de, as pleananna de réir ceantair a thabhairt ar aghaidh.

In relation to Area Based Planning, RPA Policy Paper 22 set out the high level policy approach to be adopted. The Education and Skills Authority, when established, will have overall responsibility for planning of the estate within the policy and strategic framework set by DE and thus for bringing forward area-based plans.

In the interim period, my Department is working closely with all school managing authorities to develop a strategic approach to planning throughout the north of Ireland. All projects will be examined within the wider policy framework and for post-primary school particular emphasis will be placed on the potential to deliver the Entitlement Framework.

In the Craigavon area, my Department has asked the SELB to review the capital investment needs of Lurgan College, within the wider context of delivery of the Entitlement Framework by all schools, with the view to bringing forward a strategic plan for the whole area. The plan is awaited.

Area-based Planning

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister of Education whether educational or curricular shortfalls have been identified by the Area Based Planning process in the Lurgan and Portadown areas. **(AQW 6198/10)**

Minister of Education: I dtaca le Pleanáil de réir Ceantair, leag Páipéar Polasaí 22 RPA amach an cur chuige ardleibhéil polasaí le glacadh leis. Beidh lánfhreagracht ar an Údarás um Oideachas agus Scileanna, nuair a bhunófar é, as pleanáil an eastáit laistigh den chreat straitéiseach agus polasaí atá leagtha ag an RO agus, mar sin de, as pleananna de réir ceantair a thabhairt ar aghaidh.

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I CAN Early Years Centre in Ballynahinch Primary School

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Education how much funding she will set aside to prevent the closure of the I CAN Early Years Centre in Ballynahinch Primary school; and (ii) if she is aware of the value for money and savings provided by the centre.

(AQW 6203/10)

Minister of Education: The ICAN centre in Ballynahinch Primary School provides a high quality and valued service to children and their parents.

The Department of Education (DE) does not provide direct funding to services such as the ICAN Early Years Centre. The Department distributes to Education and Library Boards (ELBs) a block grant each year from which they fund a range of services, including special education. This funding is distributed on an equitable basis to Boards who have a statutory duty to identify and make provision for children with special educational needs. They are best placed to direct those funds to local provision that most effectively meets the special educational needs of children in their Board area.

In 2006/07 DE was able to release the sum of £83k to each of the ELBs to relieve pressures on special educational needs (SEN) within each Board area. This was to be spent entirely at the discretion of the ELB in meeting local needs and it was the decision of the SEELB to direct that sum towards the funding of ICAN. It was also the SEELB's decision, in conjunction with the South-Eastern Health and Social Care Trust, to provide funding in the succeeding years.

I have visited the Centre and have seen for myself the work they are doing for young children. It is generally accepted that early intervention to address barriers to learning can make a difference to life chances and may result in lower spend at later stages.

D'iarr mé ar an BOLOD comhairle a thabhairt dom ar straitéis an Bhoird chun riachtanais gach páiste a bhfuil deacrachtaí urlabhra agus cumarsáide acu i luathbhlianta a bhaint amach, lena n-áirítear riachtanais na bpáistí sin atá ag freastal ar Ionad ICAN faoi láthair, agus scríobh mé chuig an Aire Sláinte, Seirbhísí Sóisialta agus Sábháilteacht an Phobail faoin chaoi a bhféadfadh ár n-earnálacha a obair le chéile i dtaca leis an chineál soláthair seo.

I have asked the SEELB to advise me of the Board's strategy to meet the needs of all children with speech language and communication difficulties in early years, including those currently attending the ICAN Centre, and I have written to the Minister for Health Social Services and Public Safety about how our sectors might continue to work together in relation to this type of provision.

Capital Building Projects

Ms C Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Education to list (i) the capital building projects which have been completed since 2000 in the North Belfast constituency; (ii) those currently underway; and (iii) those which are at the planning stage.

(AQW 6217/10)

Minister of Education: Since 2000 four major capital school projects have been completed in the North Belfast constituency. The projects are as follows:-

School	Project Details	Capital Cost £m	Completion Date
Cavehill P.S. Belfast	New school	1.8	August 2004
Lowwood P.S. Belfast	New school	2.0	August 2004
Dominican College, Belfast	Extension & Refurbishment	13.1	June 2006
Cedar Lodge Special School, Belfast	New school	4.54	August 2007

There are two major capital projects where construction work is currently underway. These are:-

School	Project Details	Estimated Capital Cost £m
Belfast Boys Model	New school on existing site	32.7
Belfast Model School for Girls	New school on existing site	30.1

The following four major capital school projects in the North Belfast constituency are currently at various stages of the planning process:-

School	Project Details	Estimated Capital Cost £m
Little Flower Girls S.S. Belfast	New school on existing site	8.96
Whitehouse P.S. Newtownabbey	New school on existing site	4.3
Edenderry Nursery School, Belfast	New school on new site	0.97
Glenwood P.S. Belfast	New school on existing site	10.37

The Economic Appraisal (EA) for Bunscoil Bheann Mhadagain has recently been approved by my Department. Further progress on the project is, however, subject to the outcomes of the ongoing review of capital projects and the availability of funding for future projects.

Beidh a fhios agat gur choimisiúnaigh mé, í mí Dheireadh Fómhair 2009, athbhreithniú ar gach tionscadal reatha atá fós ag an chéim phleanála. Cuideoidh an t-athbhreithniú caipitil le cur chuige níos straitéisí a fhorbairt ar chinntí infheistithe caipitil agus ar bhainistíocht eastát na scoileanna. Sa timpeallacht gheilleagrach reatha, cinnteoidh an t-athbhreithniú go n-úsáidfear gach acmhainn atá ar fáil chun na torthaí is fearr do pháistí agus an luach is fearr don cháiníocóir a bhaint amach. Mar gheall air seo, tá sé tábhachtach go ndearbhaíonn muid go bhfuil gach tionscadal caipitil ina n-infheistíonn muid inmharthana san fhadtéarma.

You will be aware that in October 2009, I commissioned a review of all current projects still in planning. This 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.

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.

Education and Library Board Structure

Mrs N Long asked the Minister of Education for her assessment of how long the current Education and Library Board structure will continue.

(AQW 6227/10)

Minister of Education: Gheall an Coiste Feidhmiúcháin go mbeadh 1 Eanáir ina dháta bunaithe don Údarás nua um Oideachas agus Scileanna (ESA) a ghlacfaidh feidhmeanna na mBord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne ar láimh. Ní dheachaigh an Bille um Oideachais ar aghaidh chuig an chéim bhreithnithe, áfach, cionn is nach ndearna an Coiste Feidhmiúcháin cioradh ar na leasuithe a bhí curtha síos agam, ag an Coiste Oideachais ná ag baill aonair. Creidim go n-aithníonn mo chomhghleacaithe ar an Choiste Feidhmiúcháin an gá le dul ar aghaidh go práinneach leis an leasú riachtanach seo sa riarachán oideachais d'fhonn go bhféadfar an tÚdarás nua seo a bhunú ag an dáta is luaithe is féidir. Leanfaidh na Boird Oideachais agus Leabharlainne dena bheith ag feidhmiú don idirthréimse roimh bhunú an ESA.

The Executive committed itself to 1 January 2010 as the establishment date for the new Education and Skills Authority (ESA) which is to take over the functions of the Education and Library Boards. However, the Education Bill has not proceeded to Consideration Stage because the Executive has yet considered the amendments that have been tabled by the Education Committee, by individual Members and by myself. I trust that my Executive colleagues recognise the need to proceed urgently on this much-needed reform of education administration so that the new authority can be established at the earliest possible date. The Education and Library Boards will continue to operate for the transitional period until the establishment of ESA.

Department for Employment and Learning

South Eastern Regional College

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many staff have been employed within the communications department of the South Eastern Regional College in each of the last three years.

(AQW 6093/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning (Sir Reg Empey): The number of staff employed in the Communications Department of South Eastern Regional College in each of the last three academic years is outlined in the table below.

Academic Year	No. of Staff Employed by South Eastern Regional College in its Communications Department
2007/08	7
2008/09	7
2009/10	7

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Northern Ireland Tourist Board

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to provide a breakdown of bonuses paid to staff at the Northern Ireland Tourist Board in each of the last three years.

(AQW 6074/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mrs A Foster): Details of bonuses paid to staff at the Northern Ireland Tourist Board in each of the last three years are as follows:

Financial Year:	Bonuses Paid:
2007/08	£ 6,000
2008/09	£15,000
2009/10	£ 1,000
Total:	£22,000

These amounts recorded are Gross Amounts before tax. The bonuses were paid under the Senior Civil Service Pay Strategy and the provisions of the Special Bonus Scheme for staff.

Project Kelvin

Ms M Anderson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline the opportunities for schools in the Foyle constituency to benefit from high-speed reliable internet connections as a result of Project Kelvin.

(AQW 6372/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Project Kelvin will not have an immediate direct impact on broadband for schools. However, as for Small Medium sized Enterprises (SMEs), Project Kelvin will enable more Internet Service Providers to provide broadband access within Northern Ireland. We have already seen evidence of this, with North West Electronics (NWE) providing wireless access in the north-west. Kelvin enables providers like these to access the Points of Presence and also obtain connectivity to internet exchanges in London and Dublin in order to provide low cost Internet Protocol Transit (IPT). Schools may, therefore, benefit from increased connectivity options and potential price reductions.

Schools may also benefit from the next generation broadband project, which I announced on 3 December 2009, when my Department awarded an £18 million contract, part funded from EU Structural Funds, to BT to deliver access to next generation broadband services to 85% of businesses by 2011. A facility to allow interested parties to check for information on specific upgrades in their areas is available at www.fasterbroadbandni.com.

It is, however, important to note that responsibility for computer connections for schools rests with the Department of Education (DE). DE has advised that a managed Information Communication Technology (ICT) service, Classroom 2000 (C2k) provides all schools in Northern Ireland with internal networks and computers and access to the internet using the local BT infrastructure. Connections to UK mainland and Republic of Ireland are delivered through the public internet and the Joint Academic Network (JANET) service. All international connections are made across the public internet. Where this public internet traffic utilizes the Kelvin infrastructure, all schools across Northern Ireland will benefit from it. However, C2K has had no direct dealings with the Kelvin project.

Department of the Environment

St Patrick's Day Celebrations 2010

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of the Environment to provide a breakdown of the total cost to (i) his Department; and (ii) Belfast City Council of the St Patrick's Day celebrations 2010 in the Holyland area of Belfast.

(AQW 5812/10)

Minister of the Environment (Mr E Poots):

- (i) My department has not incurred any direct costs for the St Patrick's Day 2010 celebrations in the Holyland area.
- (ii) The total estimated costs to Belfast City Council for these events are approximately £11,600. These costs include preparation and planning for the event, media and communication about the

event, additional staff hours and clean up costs. As this figure is an estimate it may be subject to change.

Taxi Licence

Dr W McCrea asked the Minister of the Environment if, under the terms of their licence, a taxi driver can acquire a saloon vehicle which has PSV status.

(AQW 6055/10)

Minister of the Environment: On the sale or other change of ownership of a vehicle, an existing PSV licence may be transferred, provided this is done through my Department and in accordance with the appropriate procedures.

Gobbins Path Project

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the Gobbins Path project in the East Antrim constituency.

(AQW 6057/10)

Minister of the Environment: My Department issued planning permission for the reinstatement of the Gobbins Path in September 2009. The project is led by Larne Borough Council in partnership with the National Trust. I understand they are in the process of securing the funding required to allow the project to progress.

Rose Energy Incinerator Proposal

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of the Environment how many times he has met with representatives from the Ulster Farmers' Union in relation to Rose Energy's proposal for a poultry litter incinerator at Glenavy.

(AQW 6064/10)

Minister of the Environment: I met with the President of the Ulster Farmers Union (UFU) on 3 November 2009 to discuss the business of the UFU. The Rose Energy proposal for a biomass fuelled power plant at Ballyvannon Road, Glenavy was one of the items on the agenda at that meeting.

Tyrone-Cavan Interconnector

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment if his Department has held any meetings with the residents involved in the Safe Energy for Armagh and Tyrone action group in relation to the proposed Tyrone- Cavan interconnector; and whether he would consider arranging such a meeting.

(AQW 6086/10)

Minister of the Environment: My Department has not held any meetings with the Safe Energy for Armagh and Tyrone (SEAT) action group. However in response to a request from Cllr William Irwin MLA, I met him and three representatives of the SEAT action group on Tuesday 20 April 2010.

Recycling by Councils

Mr D Kinahan asked the Minister of the Environment what action he is taking to ensure that recycling by councils meets the highest standard.

(AQW 6133/10)

Minister of the Environment: I am committed to ensuring that waste collection and treatment methods adopted by councils generate the optimal quality and quantity of recyclates enabling Northern Ireland to meet statutory targets for recycling and landfilled waste. The annual funding which my Department has provided and continues to provide to the Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) has enabled WRAP to work directly with councils, individuals and businesses across Northern Ireland providing best practice guidance on the collection and recycling of waste.

Over the last year WRAP has worked directly with 19 local councils. This assistance has been of critical importance in helping councils to plan effective and efficient waste collection systems.

My Department's funding to WRAP includes a contribution of £1.5m towards the costs of an In-vessel composting facility in Dunmurry. The facility, which I opened in November 2009, will enable 60,000 tonnes of garden and food waste to be composted to PAS 100 standard each year from households across NI. This will make a substantial contribution to improving recycling/composting rates for many councils across Northern Ireland.

Whilst there has been a significant increase in household recycling rates there is considerable variation between councils in the rates achieved. I have asked my officials to consider the potential to effect further increases in recycling rates.

Vandalism

Rev Dr R Coulter asked the Minister of the Environment how much local councils spent in 2009 on repairing damage caused by vandalism to (i) community centres; (ii) youth clubs; and (iii) play areas.
(AQW 6215/10)

Minister of the Environment: Information in the form requested is not readily available and could only be obtained at a disproportionate cost.

Department of Finance and Personnel

Land Held by Government Departments

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel (i) to list all the lands in the Upper Bann constituency which is currently held by Government Departments; and (ii) to detail (a) its purpose; (b) its value; and (c) any future plans for each of these holdings.
(AQW 6022/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr S Wilson): Please see attached Annex A

Annex A

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 (all values are from asset register)					
Marlborough House	2 Central Way Craigavon BT64 1AD	Owned	Office accommodation	£4,919,080	Same as current use
Banbridge JBO	Crown Buildings, 18 Castlewellan Road Banbridge BT32 4AZ	Owned	Jobs & Benefits Office	£1,581,595	Same as current use
Portadown JBO	Crown Building 84- 140 Jervis Street Portadown BT62 1HA	Owned	Jobs & Benefits Office	£855,510	Same as current use
Lurgan JBO	Crown Buildings, 10 Alexandra Crescent Lurgan BT66 6BB	Owned	Jobs & Benefits Office	£2,090,943	Same as current use
	6-8 Scarva Street Banbridge BT32 3DA	Leased	SDG/VS Office accommodation	£5,732	DARD occupation ending July 2010. Lease ending 30 September 2010 and building to be vacated at this time
	45 Newry Street Banbridge BT32 3EA	Leased	Office accommodation	No value on asset register	Same as current use
	2 Scarva Street Banbridge BT32 3DA	Leased	Office accommodation	No value on asset register	Same as current use
Magowan Buildings	1st floor 23-27 Magowan Buildings West Street Portadown BT62 3PN	Leased	Office accommodation	£167,651	Same as current use
Banbridge Business Centre	62 Scarva Road Banbridge BT32 3QD	Leased	Office accommodation	No value on asset register	Same as current use
DSD					
M1/M12 Motorway Portadown	N/A	Owned	Surplus	£465,750	Disposal
22 Carbet Road Portadown	N/A	Owned	Surplus	£581,130	Disposal

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
Carbet Road Portadown	N/A	Owned	Surplus	£2m	Disposal
Kilvergan Road Portadown	N/A	Owned	Surplus	£61,830	Disposal
Drumnagoon Road Portadown	N/A	Owned	Surplus	£146,655	Disposal
Charlestown Road Portadown	N/A	Owned	Surplus	£2.8m	Disposal
Drumnagoon Road Portadown	N/A	Owned	Surplus	£624,825	Disposal
Lisniskey, Portadown	N/A	Owned	Surplus	£31m	Disposal
Kernan Portadown	N/A	Owned	Surplus	£90,000	Disposal
Kernan Portadown	N/A	Owned	Surplus	£450,000	Disposal
Knockmenagh Portadown	N/A	Owned	Surplus	£19m	Disposal
Westacres Craigavon	N/A	Owned	Surplus	£998,400	Disposal
Moyravery Craigavon	N/A	Owned	Surplus	£3.8m	Disposal
Moyravery Craigavon	N/A	Owned	Surplus	£18,450	Disposal
Ardowen Craigavon	N/A	Owned	Surplus	£614,400	Disposal
Tannaghmore North Road Lurgan	N/A	Owned	Surplus	£61,771	Disposal
Ballynamoney Lane Lurgan	N/A	Owned	Surplus	£6.2m	Disposal
Carbet Road Portadown	N/A	Owned	Surplus	Awaiting value from LPS	Disposal
Drumgor Park	N/A	Owned	Surplus	Nominal	Disposal
Knockrammer Park Lurgan	N/A	Owned	Surplus	£42,000	Disposal
Tarsan Lane Lurgan	N/A	Owned	Surplus	Awaiting value from LPS	Disposal
Kernan Portadown	N/A	Owned	Surplus	£362,250	Disposal

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
Franklyn Park Lurgan	N/A	Owned	Surplus	£113,400	Disposal
Tarsan Lane Portadown	N/A	Owned	Surplus	N/A	999 Year lease
Derryvore Lane Portadown	N/A	Owned	Surplus	Awaiting value from LPS	Disposal
Seagoe Road Portadown	N/A	Owned	Surplus	£25,000	Disposal
10 Ballynamoney Lane Lurgan	N/A	Owned	Surplus	£129,875	Disposal
57 Carbet Road Portadown	N/A	Owned	Surplus	£50,467	Disposal
Carbet Road Portadown	N/A	Owned	Surplus	£217,350	Disposal
Seagoe Industrial Estate Portadown	N/A	Leased	Leased	N/A	42 year lease
Avondale Craigavon	N/A	Owned	Surplus	£5,175	Disposal
Franklyn Park Lurgan	N/A	Leased	Leased	N/A	999 year lease
Seagoe Industrial Estate	N/A	Owned	Surplus	Awaiting value from LPS	Disposal
Silverwood Business Park Lurgan	N/A	Owned	Surplus	Awaiting value from LPS	Disposal
Peacefield Ballinacor Portadown	N/A	Owned	Surplus	£55,000	Disposal
55 Carbet Road Portadown	N/A	Owned	Surplus	£48,600	Disposal
Bocombra Portadown	N/A	Owned	Surplus	N/A	999 year lease
Bocombra Portadown	N/A	Owned	Surplus	N/A	999 year lease
Tannaghmore West Road Lurgan	N/A	Owned	Surplus	£100,000	Leased
Brownlow Craigavon	N/A	Leased	Leased	N/A	999 year lease

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
Rathmore Craigavon	N/A	Owned	Surplus	£40,000	Disposal
Bocombra Portadown	N/A	Owned	Surplus	£37,500	Disposal
Brownlow Craigavon	N/A	Owned	Surplus	Awaiting value from LPS	Disposal
Silverwood Road Lurgan	N/A	Owned	Surplus	Awaiting value from LPS	Disposal
Carbet Road Portadown	N/A	Owned	Surplus	Awaiting value from LPS	Disposal
M1/M12 Motorway Craigavon	N/A	Owned	Surplus	Awaiting value from LPS	Disposal
Carbet Road Portadown	N/A	Owned	Surplus	Awaiting value from LPS	Disposal
Oakfields Craigavon	N/A	Owned	Surplus	£1,350	Disposal
Drumellan Craigavon	N/A	Owned	Surplus	£75,000	Disposal
Brownlow Craigavon	N/A	Owned	Surplus	Awaiting value from LPS	Disposal
Tullygally Craigavon	N/A	Leased	Leased	N/A	999 year lease
Franklyn Park Lurgan	N/A	Owned	Surplus	Awaiting value from LPS	Disposal
Kernan Portadown	N/A	Leased	Leased	Awaiting value from LPS	999 year lease
Charlestown Road Portadown	N/A	Owned	Surplus	Awaiting value from LPS	Disposal
Charlestown Road Portadown	N/A	Owned	Surplus	Awaiting value from LPS	Disposal
DCAL					

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
DCAL Inland Fisheries	1 Mahon Road Portadown	Owned	DCAL Public Office/Outstation/ Administration	£275,000	DCAL Public Office/Outstation/ Administration
DCAL Inland Fisheries Boathouse	40 Derrycrow Road Lurgan BT66 6PT	Access Rights leased from landowner	To secure, launch, maintain and repair fishery protection vessels on Lough Neagh	Lease £350 per annum	To use and maintain for foreseeable future
Lands at Whitecoat Point, Upper River Bann	Tandragee Road Portadown	Leased	Lands pathway along the Bann Cusher intersect downstream towards Portadown Town Centre – Public pathway used for the purposes of Water Recreation	Rental £215 per annum	Transfer to Local Council under RPA 2011
DOE					
Driver Vehicle Testing Agency	3 Diviny Drive Carn Industrial Estate Craigavon	Owned	Vehicle and Driver Testing	£888,000	Same as current use
Driver Vehicle Agency Weighbridge Facility	3 Diviny Drive Carn Industrial Estate Craigavon	Owned	Vehicle Weighbridge Facility	£115,000	Same as current use
Driver Vehicle Agency Weighbridge Facility	Dublin Road Loughbrickland	Owned	Vehicle Weighbridge Facility	£120,000 building	Same as current use
Brackagh Bog Nature Reserve	Brackagh Moss Road Portadown	Freehold/ Owned	Land managed as a Nature Reserve	£30,000	Continue with existing management
Lisnamintary Rath	Ballyargan Road Craigavon	Freehold/ Owned	Managed to protect historic site	£1,500	Continue with existing management
Turmoyra Marsh	Kinnego Embankment Lurgan	Freehold/ Owned	Used for experimental grazing and lay back land	£15,000	Continue with existing management
Lisnavaragh Fort	Lisnavaragh Road Banbridge	Freehold/ Owned, boundary uncertain	Managed to protect historic site	£1,300	Continue with existing management

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
Lisnagade Fort	Silverford Road Banbridge	Freehold/ Owned, boundary uncertain	Managed to protect historic site	£1,900	Continue with existing management
Montiaghs Moss	Featherbed Road Aghagallon	Freehold/ Owned	Managed for European designated feature interest	£360,000	Continue with existing management
Peatlands Park	Derryhubbert Portadown	Freehold/ Owned	European designated site (part Country Park, offices, storage infrastructure	Not possible to provide this within the time frame	Continue with current uses.

Population Figures for Crumlin, County Antrim

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for a summary of the population growth and the associated population figures for the town of Crumlin, County Antrim over the last 20 years.
(AQW 6123/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The population of Crumlin settlement as reported in the 1991 Census was 2,697 people. This population was based on a 2km square covering the settlement. For the equivalent spatial area the population from the 2001 Census was 4,197 people – giving a growth rate over the decade of just over 50%.

From 2001 onwards settlement statistics are reported on a more accurate geographic basis namely the statutory settlement development limit as defined by the Planning Service. The population of Crumlin settlement as reported in the 2001 Census was 4,248 people and the latest mid-2008 estimate for the population resident in Crumlin settlement is 5,100 people – giving a growth rate over the seven year period of around 20%.

‘Fuelstretcher’ in Government Buildings

Mr D Kinahan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel (i) what action he intends to take to ensure that government buildings adopt the most efficient and economic methods of heating; and (ii) what consideration he has given to installing ‘fuelstretcher’.
(AQW 6132/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The Department of Finance and Personnel Properties Division ensures that the most efficient and economic methods of heating are achieved through detailed procurement specifications at design stage and through meeting statutory regulations. Additionally, the efficient operation of heating systems is given consideration during the implementation of planned preventative maintenance programmes.

Trials involving the ‘Fuelstretcher’ technology have been carried out in two large Government buildings. Following completion of the trials my Department was not satisfied with the performance of the Fuelstretcher device and has no plans to install this equipment in any other buildings.

Rates Deferment Scheme

Ms M Anderson asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel if he would consider introducing a rates deferment scheme for businesses which are struggling as a result of the economic recession.

(AQW 6220/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: A business rates deferment scheme was introduced in Great Britain last year to provide protection from increases in business rates. In Northern Ireland it was considered that there was no need for the introduction of an equivalent scheme given that business rates were frozen in money terms last year. This year's modest increase of 2.7%, which was agreed by all parties in the Executive, provides a freeze in real terms given the level of inflation.

The holding of industrial rates at 30% as well as the introduction of a small business rate relief scheme has a combined annual cost of around £40m. This is money lost to pay for public services at a regional level. While I think that the measures we have taken to help businesses were the right thing to do, particularly during these difficult economic times, there are serious revenue implications in providing any additional concessions.

Total income from business ratepayers amounts to around £510m a year and if your enquiry relates to the introduction of a broadly based scheme that would allow the deferment of these payments, this would seriously affect the level of public finances and all the regional and district council services that are part funded through the rates, including our hospitals, schools and roads.

The budgetary consequences of a business rates deferment scheme would need to be fully understood and accepted by all Ministers before any such proposal could be examined further; in terms of its scope and eligibility, impact and effectiveness, as well as the major operational and legislative implications. Ultimately any decision would be a cross cutting matter, which would be for the Executive to decide on and it is certainly not something that my Department would initiate, or even contemplate, in isolation.

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Roe Valley Hospital

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the recruitment process to fill vacant (i) nursing; and (ii) consultancy posts in clinics at the Roe Valley Hospital.

(AQW 6048/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Mr M McGimpsey): The Western Health and Social Care Trust is responsible for the recruitment of its staff and recruits as necessary to fill vacancies.

The Trust has advised me that there are no nursing vacancies in Roe Valley at the present time.

As a Consultant Dermatologist has retired, a locum Consultant dermatologist has now been secured and will commence work within the next week.

Ulster Hospital

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the plans for the expansion of the Ulster Hospital which necessitates the use of land currently leased to Knock Golf Club.

(AQW 6073/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The current redevelopment plans for the Ulster Hospital at Dundonald are contained within the existing hospital site and the land formerly occupied by the Health Estates Agency, which is immediately to the north of the hospital. They do not require any of the land currently leased to Knock Golf Club.

Ban on the Display of Tobacco Products in Retail Outlets

Ms A Lo asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he would reconsider the implementation date for the ban on the display of tobacco products in retail outlets, in light of the limited time available to retailers to make the necessary changes to their shops and those retailers already affected by the current economic downturn.

(AQW 6135/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My primary objective in introducing further legislative controls on point of sale displays of tobacco products is to reduce the appeal, and consequently the uptake, of smoking by children and young people. Research has shown that young people are particularly susceptible to the marketing of tobacco products, which is why I propose to introduce a ban on displays from 1 December 2010, this being the earliest date possible in the legislative process. Retailers in Northern Ireland will have known from early February 2009 of my intention to introduce regulations in 2010, and will have had almost two years to prepare for this. Northern Ireland is also in a different position to the rest of the UK given our land border with the Republic of Ireland, where a display ban has been in place from July 2009.

A public consultation exercise on the proposed regulations will begin shortly, subject to Executive approval, and this will provide all retailers with the opportunity to examine the draft regulations in detail and offer views on the content and timing before they are finalised. When the consultation responses have been analysed, I will take a final decision on the timing of the display ban.

Review of Public Administration

Ms M Anderson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an indication of the implications of the Review of Public Administration for staff within the western office of the Regional Health and Social Care Board.

(AQW 6141/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: In implementing the reforms under the Review of Public Administration, the Health and Social Care Board remains committed to maintaining a strong presence in all of its local offices in Londonderry, Armagh, Ballymena and Belfast. This is considered particularly important to ensure that the Local Commissioning Groups are able to meet their obligations delegated by the Health and Social Care Board to commission services for the population each covers.

Air Traffic Problems

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what contingency plans his Department has in place to ensure that the current air traffic problems do not affect the stock of prescription medications available in local pharmacies.

(AQW 6286/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: There have been no reported shortages of prescription medications available in local pharmacies as a result of the air traffic problems caused by volcanic ash. Pharmacists are continuing, in accordance with their code of ethics, to maintain their supply of prescription medication to patients.

Women and Children's Hospital

Mr F McCann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he has recently had discussions with, or made bids to, the Minister of Finance and Personnel in relation to the new women and children's hospital.

(AQO 1048/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I have previously met with both the current and former Ministers of Finance & Personnel on issues relating to both the total budget allocated to my Department and the funding required for the Women's and Children's Hospitals in particular. Current

planning assumptions, which are constrained by my Department's budgetary allocation, mean that site enabling works are due to start in 2011, with construction of the Women's Hospital beginning in 2015/16 and construction of the Children's Hospital starting in 2017/18. I continue to seek support from my Executive colleagues to try to accelerate this timetable.

North/South Feasibility Study

Mr A Attwood asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what steps he is taking to implement the recommendations in the North South feasibility study, which was commissioned jointly by his Department and the Department of Health and Children in Dublin and completed at the beginning of 2009.

(AQO 1055/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My duty is to ensure that the people of Northern Ireland have access to safe high quality health and social care services. I have previously indicated in this House that I am prepared to support cross-border cooperation in the provision of health and social care where this can deliver real tangible benefits. The health and social care systems in each jurisdiction have proven that, where necessary, effective arrangements for closer working can be delivered on a project by project basis. The arrangements for access to radiotherapy services, to paediatric surgery services and the work on suicide prevention are but a few examples. I do not however intend to create unnecessary administrative structures around north/south cooperation, particularly in the current financial climate.

Neonatal and Maternity Services

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans he has to invest in and improve neonatal and maternity services, given that the Every Baby Matters report revealed that 200 babies are stillborn or die shortly after birth each year and a further 2000 require urgent neonatal care.

(AQO 1056/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department has invested extensively in both maternity and neonatal services in recent years. We strive to consistently meet the British Association of Perinatal Medicine standards for the ratio of neonatal nurses to cots at each level of care however, like other parts of the UK, peaks and troughs in demand mean that this is not always possible. Northern Ireland has a strong record on both stillbirth and neonatal mortality – the last official figures available show Northern Ireland performing better than any other UK region.

We do not however see this as grounds for complacency and are always striving to improve services to mothers and babies.

The figures quoted in these questions are however based on a report which is now a few years out of date. We are currently reviewing neonatal nurse staffing levels and once the results are available I will be in a position to take decisions on any further investment.

Termination of Pregnancy Guidelines

Ms A Lo asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline progress in relation to the revised guidelines on the termination of pregnancy, the law and clinical practice.

(AQO 1057/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department's guidelines on the termination of pregnancy does not change the current law on the termination of pregnancy in Northern Ireland. The recent High Court ruling stated the Guidance did not mislead health professionals about the law relating to the termination of pregnancy in Northern Ireland and that in five of the seven contested issues the court found in my Department's favour. However, he did state that the sections on Conscientious Objection and Counselling were potentially misleading and the Guidance should be withdrawn.

The two sections relating to counselling and conscientious objection have been revised and are currently being considered by Senior Counsel. The revised sections on counselling and conscientious objection will be then subjected to public consultation. Following consultation I will then submit them to the Executive Committee for consideration before being issued.

Adolescent Mental Health Services

Mr J Bell asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the pressures within adolescent mental health services and if these pressures are adequately reflected within the Health Trusts' assessment of service needs.

(AQO 1058/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Like all other health and social care services, demand for adolescent mental health services is increasing. Additional investment is required across the range of mental health services to address years of underfunding and to deliver the Bamford vision. That is why I have made Mental Health and Learning Disability my top priorities for service development.

The levels of efficiencies and budget cuts being imposed on my Department compel Trusts to provide services according to the resources available instead of providing services to meet the assessed health needs of our population.

Craigavon Area Hospital: Out-of-hours GP

Mr J O'Dowd asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans there are for changes to the out-of-hours GP service at the Craigavon Area Hospital site.

(AQO 1059/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: GP OOHs services will continue to be provided at Craigavon Area Hospital site in line with the Northern Ireland Quality Standards.

Hospital Appointments

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why the Health Service failed to meet the Programme for Government target in the last quarter of 2009 that no person should wait longer than 9 weeks for a first out-patient appointment and 13 weeks for a first inpatient appointment.

(AQO 1061/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department has made excellent progress in reducing hospital waiting times since 2005. The deterioration in performance during 2009/10 was the result of a number of factors, the most significant of which was the uncertainty around the financial position of the Health and Social Care sector in Northern Ireland. The fact that the health service is facing ever increasing demand for its services also has a substantial bearing on the delivery of the waiting times standards now and into the future.

Suicide Prevention

Mr G Adams asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) to confirm whether suicide prevention remains a priority and whether his Department will reflect this in its budget for community-based suicide prevention in 2010/11; and (ii) if funding will continue to target those communities and areas afflicted by the highest rates of suicide and attempted suicide.

(AQW 6371/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I recognise that sustained and long-term effort is necessary to reduce the incidence of suicide in Northern Ireland, particularly in those areas which experience disproportionately higher rates of suicide. Tackling suicide in our society remains a

priority for my Department, working in partnership with other Government Departments, professional bodies, and the community and voluntary sectors.

Suicide Prevention budgets are managed by the Public Health Agency and the Health and Social Care Board. Funding will be made available in 2010/11 for community-based suicide prevention and an element of this will continue to be targeted at those areas with the highest rates of suicide.

Department of Justice

Racial Categories in Departmental Questionnaires

Mr C McDevitt asked the Minister of Justice why his Department and other bodies under its aegis do not include Arab as a racial category in any of their questionnaires, surveys or other documentation.
(AQW 6103/10)

Minister of Justice (Mr D Ford): Questionnaires, surveys and other documentation produced by the Department will typically include categories comparable with those outlined in the Equality Commission's Guidance on Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, and those listed in the Northern Ireland Census.

Non-payment of Fines

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Justice how many people are currently serving jail sentences for non-payment of fines.
(AQW 6128/10)

Minister of Justice: At 19 April there were 17 people in prison in Northern Ireland for non-payment of fines.

Women's Prison at Hydebank Wood

Ms C Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Justice if he intends to visit the women's prison at Hydebank Wood in the near future; and if he plans to meet with the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety regarding healthcare for prisoners.
(AQW 6165/10)

Minister of Justice : I visited the women's prison at Hydebank Wood and the Young Offenders Centre as an early priority, on Thursday 15 April. This followed my visit to the Inspire Women's Project on 13 April. I intend to meet at an early opportunity with the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to discuss prisoner healthcare. I will be paying close attention to developments in these important areas.

Maghaberry Prison

Ms C Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Justice how he intends to address the 'work to rule' currently operated by staff in Maghaberry Prison.
(AQW 6166/10)

Minister of Justice: The 'withdrawal of goodwill' by the Prison Officers' Association (POA) ended on 9 April. The dispute related to the handling of disciplinary cases and NIPS management and the POA have agreed to appoint an Independent Appeal Panel to hear the appeals in these cases.

The Prison System

Ms C Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Justice what action he intends to take to redress the current religious and gender imbalance within the prison system.
(AQW 6167/10)

Minister of Justice : Prison Service launched a comprehensive Diversity Strategy in June 2008. It contains targets for job applicants of 35% Roman Catholic and 40% women by 2011, though recruitment opportunities are limited. An action plan sets out a range of positive measures, including partnership working with organisations and representatives from the voluntary and community sectors, affirmative action on advertising campaigns, a programme of school visits, offering summer work experience and representation at recruitment and careers exhibitions across Northern Ireland.

I have requested an early update on progress against the 2011 targets.

Contraband Mobile Phones in Prisons

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Justice how many contraband mobile phones have been recovered from prisoners in each of the last five years.

(AQW 6206/10)

Minister of Justice : The total number of mobile phones recovered from prisoners in the last five years is 321. The table below shows the establishment breakdown in each year.

Year	Maghaberry	Magilligan	Hydebank Wood
2005	1	14	1
2006	28	9	1
2007	28	40	3
2008	47	74	6
2009	26	37	6
Total	130	174	17

Convictions for Domestic Violence

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many convictions for domestic violence were secured in each of the last two years, broken down by court division.

(AQW 6209/10)

Minister of Justice : I regret that the information sought on convictions for domestic violence is not available. Court conviction data do not contain background information in relation to offences committed, and it is therefore not possible to separate out the number of convictions for offences with a domestic motivation from other types of assault.

A wider range of information on the incidence and impact of domestic violence is however available from the Northern Ireland Crime Survey at

http://www.nio.gov.uk/08_northern_ireland_crime_survey.pdf and from PSNI statistics at

http://www.psni.police.uk/2._08_09_domestic_incidents_and_crimes.pdf

Antisocial Behaviour Orders

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many people are currently bound by antisocial behaviour orders in each constituency; and how many are juveniles.

(AQW 6210/10)

Minister of Justice : The Department of Justice has been notified by the relevant authorities that as at 1 April 2010 there are 39 ASBOs, 28 Adult and 11 Juvenile, in place in Northern Ireland. The table below details the breakdown of these figures by District Council area. The information is not held by Constituency.

CURRENT ASBOS ⁽¹⁾ BY DISTRICT COUNCIL AND ADULT/JUVENILE ⁽²⁾

District Council	Adult	Juvenile	Total
Ballymena	13	7	20
Banbridge	1	0	1
Belfast	4	1	5
Carrickfergus	1	0	1
Castlereagh	1	0	1
Coleraine	1	1	2
Craigavon	1	0	1
Down	1	0	1
Fermanagh	2	0	2
Larne	2	0	2
Newry	1	2	3
Total	28	11	39

Notes

- ASBOs current as at 1st April 2010
- A juvenile is under 18 at the start of the ASBO

NB: The Anti-social Behaviour (NI) Order 2004 defines relevant authority as district councils, PSNI or Northern Ireland Housing Executive.

Youth Court Convictions

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many youth court convictions in the last two years involved sexual offences, broken down by court division.

(AQW 6212/10)

Minister of Justice : The table below gives the number of 10-17 year olds convicted for sexual offences at the youth court by court division. Data cover the calendar years 2005 and 2006 (the latest year for which figures are currently available) and are collated on the principal offence rule; only the most serious offence for which an offender is convicted is included.

NUMBER OF 10-17 YEAR OLDS CONVICTED OF SEXUAL OFFENCES AT THE YOUTH COURT¹ BY COURT DIVISION 2005 AND 2006

Youth Court	2005	2006
Antrim	1	0
Belfast	1	3
Craigavon ²	1	1
Londonderry	3	3
Total	6	7

- Excludes convictions at the Crown Court.
- Conviction in 2005 was at a magistrates' court.

Convictions for Knife Crime

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Justice how many convictions for knife crime have been secured in each of the last 24 months.

(AQW 6258/10)

Minister of Justice : I regret that the information sought on convictions for knife crime is not available in the format requested. Court conviction data do not contain background information in relation to offences committed. It is therefore not possible to separate out the number of convictions for certain offences, such as murder, in which a knife was involved. It is possible only to provide conviction statistics for those offences which, in their definition, refer to an 'offensive weapon' or 'article with blade or point' (of which knives will be one sub-category).

These are:

- Armed with offensive weapon with intent to commit offence;
- Possessing offensive weapon in public place;
- Possessing article with blade or point in public place;
- Possessing article with blade or point on school premises;
- Possessing offensive weapon on school premises.

The table below gives the number of convictions for these offences in 2005 and 2006 (the latest year for which figures are currently available) by month. Data are collated on the principal offence rule; only the most serious offence for which an offender is convicted is included.

NUMBER OF CONVICTIONS FOR OFFENSIVE WEAPON OFFENCES BY MONTH¹ 2005 AND 2006

Month	2005	2006
January	10	17
February	13	16
March	23	16
April	11	13
May	20	13
June	29	25
July	11	16
August	18	17
September	13	24
October	25	24
November	22	34
December	14	27
Total	209	242

1. Month is based on date of sentencing.

Convictions for Driving Offences

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Justice how many convictions for (i) drink driving offences; and (ii) dangerous driving offences have been secured in each of the last 24 months.

(AQW 6259/10)

Minister of Justice : The table below gives the number of convictions for drink/drug related driving offences and dangerous driving offences for the calendar years 2005 and 2006 (the latest year for which figures are currently available) by month. Data are collated on the principal offence rule; only the most serious offence for which an offender is convicted is included.

NUMBER OF CONVICTIONS FOR DRINK/DRUG DRIVING OFFENCES AND DANGEROUS DRIVING OFFENCES BY MONTH¹ 2005 AND 2006

Month	Drink/drug driving offences ²		Dangerous driving offences	
	2005	2006	2005	2006
January	288	306	32	44
February	241	229	39	52
March	220	227	37	40
April	250	221	46	21
May	252	228	30	42
June	292	294	45	38
July	211	176	28	30
August	256	210	23	36
September	210	240	35	31
October	217	268	36	40
November	226	227	36	34
December	144	183	21	36
Total	2807	2809	408	444

1. Month is based on date of sentencing.
2. Most of the convictions are for offences which refer to alcohol specifically in the definition, however, some are for offences which refer to alcohol or drugs and it is not possible to separate the two. Offences relating to 'driving whilst unfit' are also included.

Equal Pay Claims of Police Staff

Mr D McNarry asked Minister of Justice if he will keep the Assembly informed of his progress in determining the legal liability of his Department in respect of the equal pay claims of police staff.
(AQW 6356/10)

Minister of Justice : I shall ensure that the Assembly is advised of progress in the matter of the PSNI's legal liability in respect of the equal pay claims of police staff.

Department for Regional Development

20 MPH Speed Limit

Mr C McDevitt asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) in how many residential areas with the 20 mph speed limit is the limit (a) enforceable; and (b) advisable; (ii) how many 20 mph speed limits have been applied outside schools; and (iii) if he plans to extend this speed limit to other areas to detail the location and timescale.

(AQW 4937/10)

Minister for Regional Development (Mr C Murphy): I should explain that my Department's Roads Service implement 20mph zones primarily in residential areas, where an extensive network of streets is involved and self-enforcing traffic calming measures can be provided to reduce vehicle speeds to approximately 20mph. Whenever speeds have been consistently reduced to this level, it is then possible to introduce a mandatory 20mph limit. If the reduction of speed is insufficient, then it is not possible to introduce a 20mph mandatory limit.

Roads Service has advised that it has currently implemented sixty-five such zones across the North and, of these, sixty-three are mandatory speed limits, nine of which are located outside schools, with the remaining two being advisory.

I can also advise that Roads Service is currently in discussions with the PSNI Roads Policing Unit about introducing one mandatory 20mph pilot zone in each Roads Service Division, where no self enforcing traffic calming measures will be provided. The PSNI has agreed to enforce these pilots on a trial basis.

Salt Boxes in the Bannside Area of Ballymena

Mr D McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the number and location of salt boxes in the Bannside area of Ballymena.

(AQW 6062/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Road Service has advised that there are currently a total of 33 salt boxes provided within the Bannside ward of Ballymena Borough Council. Details of locations are listed in the table below:-

Road Name	Location
Cullybackey	
Kilmakevitt	House No. 1
Kilmakevitt- Lay-by	House No. 21
Kilmakevitt Square	Opposite House No. 18
Markstown Close	Light post No. 10
Fendale Park	Light post No. 1
Fendale Park	Light post No. 9
Queens Park, Dreen Road	Entrance at left hand side
Oaklands	Entrance at right hand side
Fendale Park	At Junction
Ahoghill	
Lismurn Park	Light post No. 2
Laurel Park	Opposite House No. 17
Glenhugh Road	School Entrance
Glenhugh Road	At Junction on left hand side
Glenhugh Road	Street light No. 4
Glenhugh Park	Street light No. 1
Brookfield Gardens	House No. 22
Church Road, Ahoghill	Opposite House No. 38

Road Name	Location
Beechwood Avenue	At Killane Road
Grove Road	Off Killane Park 2 No.
Glebe Cottage	Side of house No. 15
Straid Road	At Street light No. 7
New Road	At Junction
The Grange	
Moorlands	Front of House No. 15
Grange Corner	At junction of Taylorstown Hill
Taylorstown Road	Opposite street light No.4
Junction of Largy Road and Crosskeys Road	Low Side
Church Road	At Junction
Glarryford	
Station View	Rear of House No. 11
Station View	At Junction
Portglenone	
Mansfield Heights	At street light. No. 1
Garvaghy Avenue	At Entrance on the left hand side
Sperrin Heights	At Entrance
Gortgoal Road	At Hill

A4 between Granville and Ballygawley

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans are in place to ensure the installation of effective road designation and numbering for the remaining sections of the A4 between Granville and Ballygawley.

(AQW 6113/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that when the remaining length of the existing A4 between Granville and Ballygawley is superseded by the new dual carriageway, it will be downgraded and re-designated as the B34.

Roads Service is content that the new signage on both the dual carriageway and the B34 will facilitate the safe movement of traffic.

Dual Carriageway between Dungannon and Ballygawley

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans are in place to ensure the installation of effective road designation and numbering on the new dual carriageway between Dungannon and Ballygawley.

(AQW 6115/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that when the new dual carriageway between the M1 at Dungannon and Ballygawley opens to traffic it will be designated as the A4. The new dual carriageway is currently programmed to open early in 2011.

In addition to the new signage on the dual carriageway, it is presently estimated that over 40 existing signs, including advance direction signs, direction signs and route confirmation signs will be replaced.

Roads Service is content that the new signage on the dual carriageway will facilitate the safe movement of traffic.

Manufacturers or Firms Supplying Services to Translink

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the number of visits since January 2008 to manufacturers or firms supplying services to Translink by (i) departmental staff; and (ii) Translink staff at (a) the taxpayers' expense; and (b) the manufacturers' or firms' expense.

(AQW 6118/10)

Minister for Regional Development: Translink have advised me that the answer to this question would only be available at disproportionate cost. A similar position is relevant to those parts of the question relating to Departmental expenditure.

NI Water

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development if NI Water has considered adopting the mains water and sewerage system to former Ministry of Defence dwellings now in private ownership.

(AQW 6119/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that it has adopted part of the sewerage system at Hill Close/Forest Drive within the former Ministry of Defence estate at Ballykelly but has not considered adoption of the water infrastructure.

It is the responsibility of the owners of former Ministry of Development sites to make an application to NIW requesting the adoption of the sewers within the site. NIW will only adopt sewerage systems which meet the current specification and construction standards contained in its Sewers for Adoption Procedures. Guidance Notes about the Sewer Adoption process are available on the NIW website at www.niwater.com. Watermains may also be offered for adoption by agreement subject to their installation complying with current NIW specification and they must comply with current regulations and standards of performance for provision of water supplies to premises in the area.

Disability Parking Bay Application Process

Mrs N Long asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline the reasons for the delay in the disability parking bay application process in the Roads Service Eastern Division.

(AQW 6139/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that applications received in its Eastern Division for disabled parking bays are dealt with within a 21-day period, by which time the applicant will be advised, either that they have met the necessary criteria for the provision of a bay, or of the reasons why their application is not being progressed.

I should explain that disabled parking bays are authorised by means of a statutory rule (SR). Normally, details of applications that have been approved at divisional level across the North are batched on a two monthly basis and incorporated into a single draft SR. There are a number of steps involved in making an SR, including clearing the draft SR with the Department of Finance and Personnel's Departmental Solicitor's Office (DSO). In the past this has normally taken a couple of months, but I understand that over the past year, due to pressures on staff resources within the DSO, the timeframe for getting draft SRs cleared has increased significantly. Roads Service is in regular contact with the DSO about this issue and I understand DSO is seeking additional resources in order to address the backlog situation.

I hope this has reassured you that Roads Service is dealing with all applications in an appropriate manner and that any delays currently being experienced are outside of its control. If you have particular concerns regarding any specific applications where you feel that delays are excessive, please provide me with the details and I will have the matter investigated.

Resurfacing Work on Abbot Drive, Newtownards

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 5333/10 why resurfacing work on Abbot Drive, in the Bowtown Estate, Newtownards has not commenced particularly in light of a recent near miss vehicle accident when a car slid across the road due to the poor conditions.

(AQW 6164/10)

Minister for Regional Development: As I advised in my reply to your recent Question AQW 5333/10, my Department's Roads Service has programmed a resurfacing scheme for Abbot Drive, Newtownards. Whilst it had been hoped to have this work completed before the end of March, the contractor has been under pressure to complete other schemes which were already on the resurfacing programme. In addition, time was also lost due to the contractor closing for a holiday period during the Easter week.

I am advised by Roads Service that the contractor hopes to be on site no later than week commencing 26 April 2010.

Roads Service is not aware of any incident involving a car sliding across the road. However, I can confirm that interim repairs were carried out on the worst potholes last week on Abbot Drive, as a holding measure, pending the completion of the resurfacing scheme.

Land at Rushmere Shopping Centre in Craigavon

Mr J O'Dowd asked the Minister for Regional Development if and when his Department will make land at the east side of Rushmere Shopping centre in Craigavon available on the open market to allow development of the site.

(AQW 6171/10)

Minister for Regional Development: The Member will be aware that the proposed disposal of the subject land to the rear of Rushmere Shopping Centre has proved to be a very complex case. However, following my meeting with the Minister for the Department for Social Development, in December 2009, I instructed my Department's Roads Service to explore with Department of Finance and Personnel's Land and Property Services (LPS), and our Departmental Solicitors Office (DSO), the option of offering the subject land for sale on the open market. This would be subject to a successful abandonment of the public road, which would contain conditions concerning the provision of alternative permanent facilities. I am pleased to report that, in the circumstances particular to this case, both LPS and DSO have agreed to proceed along these lines.

The current position is that Roads Service has requested and is awaiting information from utilities, regarding the location of their apparatus in the subject area. Also, an additional adjacent plot of land has been identified, which could be put on the market at the same time. Once all this information is to hand, DSO will start preparing the contract for sale. We are therefore unable to indicate at this stage when the site might become available on the open market.

Windsor Railway Halt, South Belfast

Mr A Maskey asked the Minister for Regional Development what consideration his Department has given to the extension or relocation of the Windsor railway halt in light of the proposed development of Windsor Park, South Belfast.

(AQW 6183/10)

Minister for Regional Development: There currently is no halt at Windsor and the nearest halt is located at Adelaide. I understand NITHC/Translink have, however, had some recent discussions with the Irish Football Association (IFA) in relation to transport solutions to get fans to and from the ground

and have advised the IFA that the costs associated with moving the halt to beside Windsor Park would be prohibitive. However they are currently considering other options, including providing a new pathway from Adelaide halt to Windsor Park and also to providing a number of dedicated bus services. My department is currently in the process of reviewing future Translink capital plans in the light of indicative resourcing.

Speed Limit for the Upper Saintfield Road

Ms A Lo asked the Minister for Regional Development what consideration he has given to implementing a reduction in the speed limit for the Upper Saintfield Road in order to improve road safety.

(AQW 6256/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that speed limits are set in line with guidelines, which take into account several factors including, for example, the character of the road, the density of development, the local environment, the collision history and traffic speeds. The existing 50mph speed limit on the Upper Saintfield Road, between Cairnshill Road and the Carryduff Roundabout has been in place since 1981.

Roads Service reviewed the speed limit on this section of road in February 2010, when it was concluded that the current speed limit was appropriate. As such, there are at present, no plans to change the current speed limit at this location.

DRD: Irish-Language Policy

Mr P Butler asked the Minister for Regional Development what progress his Department is making in implementing an Irish-language policy under the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.

(AQO 1065/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department has made significant progress in developing an Irish language policy to fulfil the commitments in the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. The policy, which is set out in a Code of Courtesy, includes the following measures:

- The translation of all Ministerial forewords to Plans, Reports and Consultation Documents into Irish;
- The translation of all new or revised information leaflets and application forms into Irish;
- The creation of a multilingual section on my Department's website, to provide key information on Departmental functions in Irish;
- The use of bilingual headlines in English and Irish on all advertisements placed by my Department in national and local press publications;
- The ongoing publication of significant Departmental announcements in Irish-language newspapers and the use of Irish-language media in campaign advertising;
- The provision of lunchtime training classes in Irish for staff to help them deal with correspondence and telephone calls received in Irish; and
- The development of policy which will permit the erection of certain types of traffic sign in both English and Irish, on the request of local councils.

My Department's Arms-Length Bodies are also developing Irish-language policies.

NITHCo/Translink has developed a variety of materials available in Irish in response to local needs, such as school safety publications, user guides, and information at bus stops in identified Irish-language areas, including the Falls Road and Shaws Road in Belfast. Cross-border services from Derry, i.e. services 274 and 296, and Bus Éireann vehicles operating between Belfast and Dublin carry bilingual destination screens.

NIW has provided Irish-language posters and invitations for schools competitions, to encourage participation from Irish-medium schools. It is also formulating a Code of Courtesy for the Irish language.

Newry Cycle Lanes

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans there are for the development of further cycle lanes in Newry City.

(AQO 1067/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that, due to the limited footway and carriageway widths within Newry City Centre, it has proven difficult to construct links between the cycle lanes already provided on the A2 Warrenpoint to Newry dual carriageway, at Kilmorey Street and on the Armagh Road.

Roads Service has identified the possibility of providing cycle lanes on the hard shoulders of the existing Newry Bypass after the new A1 Newry Bypass has been completed. This option will be given further consideration once traffic patterns, under the new bypass arrangements, are known and the likely demand from cyclists can be better determined.

Roads Service will continue to identify opportunities for cycle lanes, however, because of physical and financial constraints, it is unlikely that any further cycle lanes will be provided in Newry City in the near future.

Water Supply

Dr A McDonnell asked the Minister for Regional Development how many dwellings do not have access to the public water supply.

(AQO 1069/10)

Minister for Regional Development: In answering this question it is important to distinguish between properties that are not served by a water main (in other words there is no water main nearby) and those which are not connected to a water main which is nearby.

My Department has initiated a review of financial assistance for domestic properties not served by mains water. The review estimates that there may be up to 1,200 private dwellings that are not served by a mains water supply. This figure includes many householders who do not wish to be connected as they have an adequate private supply.

NIW customer records indicate that there may be up to 8,000 domestic properties that are not connected. However, with the deferral of additional household payments NIW has been unable to use its billing system to update this information in order to confirm the accuracy of the figure.

A5 Consultation

Mr P Doherty asked the Minister for Regional Development what consultation has taken place between Roads Service and land owners located on the proposed A5 route.

(AQO 1070/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has had ongoing consultation with landowners and the public since the start of the A5 Dualling project. Consultation events were held in April 2008 to present the Study Area, in February 2009 to present the Route Options and in July 2009 to present the Preferred Route.

Since the July 2009 consultation event, members of the project team have met directly with the affected landowners to discuss in detail the impacts of the project. A second round of meetings to discuss issues such as access and accommodation works is currently ongoing. A third round of meetings to confirm updated landtake and to further discuss proposed accommodation works, will take place in the summer of this year.

Belfast Rapid Transit System

Ms J McCann asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline progress in relation to the Belfast Rapid Transit project.

(AQO 1071/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department recently completed a public consultation on the policy proposals which will inform new primary legislation. Rapid Transit Division are currently finalising the Consultation Report and progressing the required legislation with a view to introducing it to the Assembly in June 2010.

My Department hopes to be in a position to appoint consultants to assist with the preparation of an Outline Business Case for Belfast Rapid Transit later this year.

Rapid Transit Division are currently preparing layout drawings for the route alignment options and these will, as part of the Outline Business Case process, form part of a public awareness exercise early in 2011.

Water Charges

Mr F Cobain asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline his Department's current position on water charges.

(AQO 1074/10)

Minister for Regional Development: Through the budget process the Executive has agreed to continue to fund water and sewerage services for 2010/11 in line with existing arrangements. Additional household contributions will not be sought for 2010/11 and current non-domestic arrangements will continue. Decisions beyond 2010/11 will be taken by the Executive in the context of the 2010 Budget process.

Road Repairs

Mr A McQuillan asked the Minister for Regional Development how much of the additional £100m, announced by the Chancellor in his Budget for the repair of roads damaged by the recent bad weather, will be allocated to road repairs in Northern Ireland.

(AQO 1075/10)

Minister for Regional Development: All allocations received by the Executive through the Barnett Formula from additional funding announced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer are unhypothecated.

That is to say that they are available to the Executive to spend in correspondence with local needs and priorities.

None of the funding announced by the Chancellor has been allocated to my Department for road repairs here at this stage.

However the Executive has previously provided £15 million in additional funding for Roads Structural Maintenance, as part of the 2009-10 December Monitoring Round.

Road Safety

Mr A Bresland asked the Minister for Regional Development what action his Department is taking to improve road safety.

(AQO 1076/10)

Minister for Regional Development: Road Safety is a key priority for my Department's Roads Service. To that end, Roads Service is guided by the Regional Transportation Strategy for NI 2002 – 2012, which identifies the importance of Local Transport Safety Measures (LTSM) and highlights some principal initiatives to be addressed. These initiatives include:-

- local improvements in towns across the North, to assist pedestrians and cyclists;

- elimination of 75% of the road maintenance backlog, with two thirds of this expenditure in rural areas; and
- local highway infrastructure measures to improve safety, including collision remedial schemes and traffic calming schemes.

Eight years into the 10 year programme, Roads Service has invested some £198 million in Local Transport Safety Measures (LTSM). In a typical year, expenditure would average around £25 million, and for this Roads Service would expect to achieve an average of:-

- 37 collision remedial schemes;
- traffic calming on 210 streets;
- 55 school travel and safety projects;
- 20 kilometres of new cycle lanes;
- 16 kilometres of new footway;
- 30 controlled pedestrian crossings;
- £1.5 million on travel information schemes; and
- £10 million on minor works schemes (mainly rural).

I am pleased to report that the collision remedial programme has provided an excellent return on the investment, for example, in financial year 2005/06 Roads Service completed 59 such schemes. In the three years prior to this, there were 201 accidents at these 59 sites, however, in the three years following completion of the schemes, this had reduced to 55 accidents, equating to a 73% reduction.

There has also been a marked reduction in collisions after implementation of traffic calming schemes. In an average year, Roads Service would expect to implement 50 of these schemes. Typically, this type of scheme will be expected to deliver three fewer collisions in the three years following completion, equating to a total reduction of approximately 150 fewer collisions over a three year period.

Roads Service will also spend approximately £10m annually on network development schemes. These schemes are largely carried out in rural areas and are mainly corner or junction improvements to assist in the safety and progression of traffic.

In addition, my Department is committed to installing road safety facilities outside schools as part of the Travelwise Safer Routes to Schools initiative. This normally involves providing flashing school warning signs and enhanced road safety features near schools, to advise motorists of the presence of children.

My Department also aims to raise awareness of road safety through the Travelwise NI Schools initiative. It has been specifically developed for the education sector, to promote and support sustainable transport options for the school journey, in consultation with Travelwise partner organisations, including the Department of the Environment's Road Safety Division. All Travelwise NI Schools resources and initiatives include road safety information and advice.

Department for Social Development

Renewable Energy in Newbuild Social Housing

Mr R McCartney asked the Minister for Social Development if her Department has developed a strategy for prioritising renewable energy in newbuild social housing.

(AQW 6101/10)

Minister for Social Development (Ms M Ritchie): New Social Housing must already conform to a minimum of code level 3 in the Code for Sustainable Homes. In effect these homes are now 25% more energy efficient than ever before. However to incentivise those Housing Associations who can build to

even higher standards, I have made further funding available if they can build to code 4 standard, a standard that ultimately requires a greater use of renewable and more sustainable technology if it is to be achieved.

I have also launched a pilot project that will see 70 new homes built to the very highest levels of the Code, right up to code 5/6 in a mixed tenure scheme that will go on site in South Belfast later this year. This ground breaking development will be one of only a few in the UK to be built to this level of sustainability and will provide important learning for the industry as we move towards our 2016 zero carbon aspiration.

The Housing Executive is the Home Energy Conservation Authority for Northern Ireland with a responsibility to improve the energy efficiency of residential accommodation by 34%. As part of this responsibility they have been leading the way in testing the viability of renewable and emerging technologies, some of which are already installed in their homes.

Multi-Element Improvement Schemes

Mr A McQuillan asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 5605/10, when she will be in a position to advise of any forthcoming Multi-Element Improvement Schemes.

(AQW 6162/10)

Minister for Social Development: I outlined in the Adjournment Debate in the Assembly, on 23 March 2010, that multi element improvement schemes can only proceed if and when funding becomes available. My Department is again facing a significant shortfall in the housing budget in 2010/11 which will affect all programmes including multi element improvement schemes. I am currently exploring other options to deal with multi-element improvement schemes.

Northern Ireland Assembly Commission

Information Point and Internet Access Facility in the Great Hall of Parliament Buildings

Mr J Wells asked the Assembly Commission (i) whether it was consulted before the information point and internet access facility was installed in the entrance of the Great Hall of Parliament Buildings; (ii) for its assessment of whether the design of this facility is appropriate for the entrance of a listed building; and (iii) how many people have used this facility since it was installed.

(AQW 6051/10)

The Representative of the Assembly Commission (Mr S Moutray): In response to your question:

- (i) The Department of Finance and Personnel requested that a portable information internet kiosk to be installed in Parliament Buildings on a temporary basis. Similar installations are in the following government and public sites, Castle Buildings, Clare House and Causeway Exchange and other public areas such as Forrest side Shopping complex. The Assembly Commission has delegated all of its functions, subject to some exemptions and conditions, to the Clerk/Director General. On 16 October 2009 the Secretariat Management Group, which is chaired by the Clerk/Director General agreed to the installation of a touch-screen information kiosk in a public area of Parliament Buildings in order to provide a range of government-related information.
- (ii) The information point is a movable facility that has been placed in the entrance area of Parliament Buildings on a trial basis and as such does not detract from the listed status of Parliament Buildings. The fabric of the building has not been altered in any way to facilitate the information point.
- (iii) The Department of Finance and Personnel has provided the following statistics:
 - 2,028 unique sessions from 17 December 2009 to 31 March 2010
 - This accounted for 23,000 navigations

Top sites visited include:

- Facebook (3,928)
- You Tube (818)
- Job Centre Online (392)
- Belfast City Online (317)
- Driver & Vehicle Agency (212)
- BBC News (158)
- Goto Belfast.com (147)
- Access 2 Benefits (137)

Car Parks at Parliament Buildings

Mr G Savage asked the Assembly Commission what plans it has to resolve car parking issues for staff at Parliament Buildings.

(AQW 6253/10)

The Representative of the Assembly Commission (Mr S Neeson): The Assembly Commission fully recognises the difficulties experienced in parking within the car parks, particularly on sitting days.

The lower East car park continues to be maintained by DFP and Assembly staff share that car park with NICS staff. Inevitably this results in that particular car park being used to full capacity and beyond on most days.

Enquiries to date have also concluded that it would not be possible to increase the number of parking spaces within the car parks without recourse to significant works and redevelopment.

Naturally, Security staff are on hand however within the upper car parks to ensure that the limited parking space available is used as efficiently as possible, and that inconvenience and obstruction is avoided.

The matter is being kept under review however and I can also confirm that the Commission has already requested that the Secretariat engage with DFP at senior level, to establish if there are any other measures that can be taken to resolve the broader problem of car parking. To that end DFP and Northern Ireland Assembly have now a Working Group to deal with this and other Estate related matters.

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.

Education

Attacks on teaching Staff

In Bound Volume 49, page WA89, replace the answer to question (AQW 4829/10) asked by Mr Lunn with:

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	265	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.

Regional Development

Article 11 Procedures Served on Building Contractors

In Bound Volume 49, page WA280, replace the answer to question (AQW 5010/10) asked by Mr O'Dowd with:

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	4
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
Dungannon	3
Strabane	2
Cookstown	1
TOTAL	47

As indicated in the tables above, over the last two years, the Department served Article 11 procedures on 89 occasions and incurred costs of £2,211 when completing 1 development. In all other instances, the costs associated with completing each of the developments are recovered from developers' road bonds.

‘Invest to Save’ Initiative

In Bound Volume 49, page WA290, replace the answer to question (AQW 5176/10) asked by Dr Farry with:

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.

INVEST TO SAVE BIDS

Proposal	Cost £m
Structural Maintenance - By funding a programme of appropriately timed and hence planned maintenance of a proper magnitude, long term savings can be achieved.	26.000
Street Lighting Lantern Replacement – By replacing selected old high wattage street lighting lanterns with new, more efficient, versions with lower power consumption	1.000
Bridge Maintenance – Preventative maintenance/ early repair resulting in savings.	0.500
Enterprise Locomotive Modernisation – By reconfiguring the 3 existing Enterprise train sets, resulting in improvements to fuel efficiency, operational efficiency and reliability.	1.365
Replacement of fluorescent lighting – fit energy efficient T5 Fluorescent lighting across Translink network of sites	0.500
Driver Monitoring for Fuel Economy - supply and fit Monitoring Devices to 1500 Translink buses and coaches and provide feedback to driver to reduce fuel consumption.	2.000
Installation of gas radiant heating system at York Road running workshops to replace oil fired forced warm air heating. – resulting in fuel saving	0.400
Upgrade of Class 3000 Trains Lighting System - resulting in fuel saving	0.096

Regional Development

Rail and Bus Fuel Installation, Inspection and Maintenance

In Bound Volume 45, page WA166, replace the answer to question (AQW 2427/10) asked by Mr Spratt with:

The cost of the Rail and Bus Fuel Installation, Inspection and Maintenance contracts in each of the last three years are set out in the tables below:

COST OF FUEL INSTALLATIONS

	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
	£	£	£
Bus	Nil	381,720	208,652
Rail	Nil	123,789	26,701
Total	Nil	505,509	235,353

COST OF INSPECTION AND MAINTENANCE

	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
	£	£	£
Bus	19,688	30,528	28,938
Rail	3,413	8,820	19,881
Total	23,101	39,348	48,819

In respect of the contracts for fuel installation referred to in AQW1720/10 Translink have agreed to meet face to face with yourself or any other interested party to discuss the evaluation. Translink have also highlighted that it is open to anyone to pursue a complaint about the tender process. This is set out on the Translink website.

Education

Religious Background of Pupils Attending Integrated Schools

In Bound Volume 50, page WA77, replace the answer to question (AQW 5788/10) asked by Mr Gardiner with:

My Department's policy is that Grant Maintained Integrated schools should have at least 30% of pupils drawn from the minority community at the school. Existing schools transforming to integrated status (Controlled Integrated) must demonstrate the ability to achieve a minimum of 10% of their first year intake drawn from the minority tradition within the school's enrolment and the potential to achieve a minimum of 30% in the longer term.

Pupils that are recorded as not belonging to either of the main traditions (Protestant or Catholic) are recorded as 'other' and are not included in the consideration of religious balance as there is no legislative requirement to do so.

There are currently 61 Integrated schools in the north of Ireland comprising of 41 Primary schools and 20 Post-primary schools.

Léiríonn daonáireamh scoile na bliana 2009 nach bhfuil 15 bunscoil agus 7 n-iarbhunscoil ag baint bheartas na Roinne amach um 30% den iontráil a ghlacadh ón phobal mionlaigh.

The 2009 school census indicates that there are 22 schools (15 Primary and 7 Post-primary) which do not currently meet the Department's criteria of achieving a 30% minority enrolment drawn from the minority community.

Data from 2000 until the present indicates the following:-

No. of years unable to meet criteria	No. of schools
10	3
7	2
6	3
5	1
4	2
3	2
2	2
1	7

Environment

Planning Applications in the East Antrim Constituency

In Bound Volume 50, page WA104, replace the answer to question (AQW 5567/10) asked by Mr Beggs with:

A copy of the list has been placed in the Assembly Library drawn up from my Department's records of all planning applications on which Sammy Wilson MP MLA made representations to the Planning Service in relation to his East Antrim constituency during his tenure as Environment Minister. The list includes details of correspondence where it relates to specific planning applications and to applications discussed in office meetings with the Divisional Planning Manager. The applications are open to public scrutiny by request to the appropriate Divisional Planning Office.

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