



Northern Ireland
Assembly

OFFICIAL REPORT

(Hansard)

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Bannside, The Lord (North Antrim)
Beggs, Roy (East Antrim)
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Bradley, Dominic (Newry and Armagh)
Bradley, Mrs Mary (Foyle)
Bradley, P J (South Down)
Brady, Mickey (Newry and Armagh)
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Craig, Jonathan (Lagan Valley)
Cree, Leslie (North Down)
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Givan, Paul (Lagan Valley)
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McGill, Mrs Claire (West Tyrone)
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McGlone, Patsy (Mid Ulster)
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Neeson, Sean (East Antrim)
Newton, Robin (East Belfast)
Ní Chuilín, Ms Carál (North Belfast)
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O'Loan, Declan (North Antrim)
O'Neill, Mrs Michelle (Mid Ulster)
Poots, Edwin (Lagan Valley)
Purvis, Ms Dawn (East Belfast)
Ramsey, Pat (Foyle)
Ramsey, Ms Sue (West Belfast)
Ritchie, Ms Margaret (South Down)
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Robinson, Ken (East Antrim)
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Ross, Alastair (East Antrim)
Ruane, Ms Cairíona (South Down)
Savage, George (Upper Bann)
Spratt, Jimmy (South Belfast)
Storey, Mervyn (North Antrim)
Weir, Peter (North Down)
Wells, Jim (South Down)
Wilson, Brian (North Down)
Wilson, Sammy (East Antrim)

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Ministerial Offices

The Executive Committee

First Minister	Mr Peter Robinson
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Minister for Employment and Learning	Sir Reg Empey
Minister for Regional Development	Mr Conor Murphy
Minister for Social Development	Mr Alex Attwood
Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development.....	Ms Michelle Gildernew
Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure.....	Mr Nelson McCausland
Minister of Education.....	Ms Caitríona Ruane
Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment.....	Mrs Arlene Foster
Minister of the Environment	Mr Edwin Poots
Minister of Finance and Personnel.....	Mr Sammy Wilson
Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety.....	Mr Michael McGimpsey
Minister of Justice.....	Mr David Ford

Junior Ministers

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister	Mr Gerry Kelly
	Mr Robin Newton

Assembly Sittings

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 4 October 2010

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Assembly Business

Mr Weir: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. In the statement that the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety made last week in relation to the correction that he was making, he indicated that he was correcting an inaccuracy that had been made in the House. Yet, as I understand it, that inaccuracy was repeated on two other occasions. Could you clarify whether the correction to the record is for the one occasion that he referred to in his statement, or whether it is for all three occasions on which he made the inaccurate statement?

Mr Speaker: I hear what the Member has said. I am not aware of any other occasion on which the Minister has, incorrectly, given information to the House. When Ministers give incorrect information to the House, it is up to them to tell the House, and especially the Speaker, how they are going to correct that information. On the personal statement that the Minister gave on that particular occasion, he corrected the piece of information that, incorrectly, he had given to the House. If there are other occasions on which the Minister has given incorrect information, I will be happy to listen.

Mrs Foster: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. The statement from the Minister last week dealt with just one of the inaccuracies in his answer to me. However, there were three inaccuracies in his answer to me. I just want to clarify whether his statement covered all three inaccuracies or whether he needed to be clearer in relation to the matter.

Mr Speaker: I will look at the Hansard report and will be happy to come back to the House directly or to the Members who raised the point of order.

Committee Business

Statutory Committee Membership

Mr Speaker: The first item on the Order Paper is a motion on Statutory Committee membership. As with other similar motions, this will be treated as a business motion. Therefore, there will be no debate.

Resolved:

That Mr William Humphrey replace Mr Trevor Clarke as a member of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister and Miss Michelle McIlveen as a member of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure. — [Mr Weir.]

Private Members' Business

Investing in the Social Economy

Mr Speaker: The Business Committee has allowed up to one hour and 30 minutes for the debate. The proposer of the motion will have 10 minutes 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.

Ms J McCann: I beg to move

That this Assembly recognises the positive contribution that the social economy makes to growing the economy, creating employment opportunities and regenerating communities; and calls on the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to ensure that the social economy remains a priority and that it is given adequate financial investment, resources and support.

Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle; thank you, Mr Speaker. I welcome the opportunity to open the debate. Given the current economic climate and the constraints on public spending, this debate is important. I believe that our priorities must be to protect jobs and to create new job opportunities by building a sustainable economy. Although more than one area must be looked at when thinking about economic recovery, in rebalancing the economy, priority must be given to the investment in and retention of jobs and to the creation of new jobs in specific sectors.

There are approximately 1,200 social enterprises throughout the North of Ireland. They employ more than 20,000 people. Instead of going to owners or directors, those businesses' profits are reinvested into their local communities. That, in turn, regenerates those communities and ensures economic growth, particularly in areas of disadvantage and need.

Those organisations can be large employers such as Bryson House, or they can be smaller businesses that employ fewer than 10 people. They cover a range of services. In my constituency, Colin Care, which was set up for a small initial investment of less than £30,000, now employs nearly 30 people. Therefore, investing in the social economy sector, giving organisations the resources that they need to sustain themselves in the short term and looking at new and innovative ways to develop and grow them in the longer term can and should be part of the economic recovery.

The sector has a long and rich tradition of providing quality services to disadvantaged communities and of creating innovative pathways to employment for people who can, sometimes, be excluded or who are distant from the labour market. That covers a raft of organisations from credit unions, providers of childcare and care for the elderly to financial, retail and environmental services. A broad range of structures and services make up that very vibrant sector of the economy.

The sector is also well positioned to assist the Executive to meet some of their social and economic goals. It has a unique contribution to make to the economy in, as I said, regenerating those communities that are disadvantaged and in need. Growth and development of the social economy will happen only if the Executive and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI), which has core responsibility for the matter, ensure that the sector is given the financial investment that it needs, that its positive contribution to the economy and local communities is recognised and that it is developed and allowed to grow.

However, we should look not only at public moneys. That is not the aim of the motion. For example, in Britain, there is a new investment fund called Big Issue Invest, which is a London-based social financing organisation. It brings opportunities to social enterprises to enable them to access investment from, I believe, a £10 million fund. In the South of Ireland, an investment fund has been set up and is operational. It is managed by the Social Finance Foundation in Dublin. That fund was set up without any public money at all; all its capital comes from the banking sector. Despite the dire straits in which the Irish economy, particularly the banking sector, finds itself, banks have made that commitment to invest €6 million a year for the next 12 years to top up their initial investment of €25 million. That fund will fall just short of €100 million. That shows the way that the social economy is starting to be viewed, even in the South of Ireland.

The issue of dormant bank accounts has still not been sorted out. Although organisations have lobbied a great deal for access to those dormant bank accounts, I say again that the Assembly and the Executive could legislate to ensure that money from those accounts in the North is used to create a fund that is similar to those that I mentioned.

During recent Committee meetings at which representatives from the banks gave evidence, it was made clear that even though the financial regulation of banks and financial institutions is a reserved matter, there is potential for those powers to be devolved to the Executive and the Assembly. Given that we need to get the banks on board with regard to lending to small and medium-sized businesses to get that cash flow going again, and for social economy businesses, we could, perhaps, also look at that initiative.

Investment in public procurement could help the social economy. Smaller companies need to enter the competition for public procurement contracts with the same level of expertise as some of the larger companies, because smaller companies will be strategic players in delivering important social policy outcomes. By including social clauses in public procurement practices and specifications, which measure the social value of a project alongside its economic value, Departments can ensure that social economy projects are not disadvantaged at any stage of the procurement process. That will have a direct impact on challenging existing patterns of disadvantage and need because it will also include the targeting of the long-term unemployed and the creation of apprenticeships.

A recent report highlighted the totally unacceptable number of our young people who are unemployed. A percentage of those young people have, perhaps, left school without any academic qualifications; they are trying to get a job, but they cannot. There is an onus on us to ensure that although those people can go into quality apprenticeships and learn a trade, they can go back to study for further qualifications, if that is what they decide that they want to do during their apprenticeship process, or go on to work. We owe it to our young people to invest in their young lives and give them the same opportunities and access to opportunities as other people.

By creating that employment in economically and socially disadvantaged communities, we can also ensure that the wealth from those social enterprises is kept within those communities. When money is put into the social economy, services are delivered in the local community and, subsequently, the moneys go back into the local community. It creates a system in which the local economy is also being built up, which is important.

There are examples of how that happens in places such as Britain and the South of Ireland. There is potential for job creation in the management of properties and land, for instance, particularly in social housing estates. Such estate management initiatives employ local people to cut the grass in green areas, remove graffiti and keep those estates up to standard. That has to come from local and central government contracts going into the social economy sector. It would be a win-win situation for the Executive and the Assembly and is an area in which we can make a difference to people's lives.

It is not only public moneys that can be invested in the social economy. We have to start to challenge the existing patterns of disadvantage and need and to look at the statistics. The 2001 NISRA statistics indicated the most socially deprived areas and those that were in most social need, but the 2010 statistics will show that those areas are now in a worse position.

What we are doing, and what we have been doing, has not tackled disadvantage and need. In some cases and some sectors, levels of disadvantage and need are actually worse. I know that the motion might seem to address only a small part of the issue, but it is a very important part. I hope that people will support the motion and will see that the social economy is an essential part of both growing the economy and challenging disadvantage and need.

12.15 pm

The Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment

(Mr A Maginness): As Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment, I support the motion. It is a timely motion, and it is important that we address the whole issue of the social economy. The Committee has been generally supportive of the social economy and of assisting it to develop and flourish here in Northern Ireland. I know that the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, Arlene Foster, regards the social economy as a priority in her Department, and we support her efforts to promote it. I know that she is taking time and effort to try to develop the social economy in Northern Ireland.

I say that the motion is timely because we are in a recession and are having serious difficulty in developing our economy, trying to preserve jobs and so forth. We should not regard support

for the social economy as something that is expendable in these difficult circumstances. We should continue to support it. It makes a significant contribution at a local community level, and, at this time of recession, we should not say that it is something that we can do without. We should continue to support the social economy, and I hope that the Executive will support it.

I congratulate Jennifer McCann on proposing the motion. She spoke about the fact that there are probably around 20,000 people employed or involved in the social economy. Apart from those who are employed, there are many who volunteer in the social economy sector because they see that as a way of giving their time and skills to the local community. I am thinking of organisations in my constituency, such as the Ashton Centre, Bryson House and Ulster Sheltered Employment Ltd, which give tremendous support to people, particularly those who are disadvantaged in education, social skills and even physical abilities. It is very important that we continue to support them.

We have to try to enhance the social economy in a number of different ways, and I think that the Committee would support that. We need to involve the credit unions in the social economy where possible. They already make a contribution but it is not as direct as it could be, so we have to expand the powers of the credit unions so that they can make a direct contribution to and investment in the social economy. The expansion of the powers of the credit unions is very important. I am also slightly critical of Invest Northern Ireland, which has not been as supportive as it could be as regards funding, particularly funding of the Ulster Community Investment Trust (UCIT), which makes a great contribution to the social economy.

UCIT has been marvellously successful in supporting the social economy and in demanding that the enterprises that it supports work and deliver not just jobs but outcomes and profitability. Therefore, I ask the Department to look again at UCIT's contribution to the social economy, be more supportive of it and let Invest Northern Ireland develop a fuller working partnership with it.

Mr Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment: In conclusion, more Departments than just the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

must deal with this issue. The other relevant Departments include the Department for Social Development (DSD), the Health Department and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD).

Mr Speaker: I ask the Member to finish.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment: I hope that they will assist in the whole process of supporting the social economy.

Mr Hamilton: Like the Chairperson of the Committee, I support the motion. A number of years ago, when I first heard the term "social economy", I was a bit unsure and, even, sceptical about it. I thought that it was a bit marginal and that not wanting to make a profit was a bit loony and a bit lefty. I have, however, developed a growing appreciation of the sector's contribution. The Chairperson of the Finance Committee, who moved the motion, continuously talks about the social economy and social enterprises. In fact, if I were to put some of her contributions in the House into one of those word clouds on the Internet, such as Wordle, "social" and "economy" would be the two biggest words to come out of it.

Like Ms McCann and others in the House, I have a growing appreciation of the growing scale of the social economy in Northern Ireland. There are different estimates for the contribution that it makes to the economy. However, the figures included in the social economy enterprise (SEE) strategy cannot be baulked at, because they show that the sector has an annual turnover in excess of £350 million. Nobody can baulk at that, particularly in a recession.

There are many exceptional examples of social economy enterprises right across Northern Ireland. Last week, I had occasion to be at the launch of Bryson Group's annual review. I would not be surprised if that social enterprise were to appear in the 'Belfast Telegraph' list of top 100 companies. It is vast and does so much, and yet, all the time, it retains the essential ethos of a social economy enterprise. At the annual review, two of the Bryson Group's services stuck in my head, one of which was its recycling business, which, as everybody knows, is pretty big. It collects some 25% of Northern Ireland's recyclable waste, and over 30% of that waste is then recycled in Northern Ireland. Unlike private operators who might ship waste off to China to make a bigger profit, despite all the

environmental damage that that causes, Bryson recycles the waste here, yet it still makes a profit.

Another important aspect of the Bryson Group's work is the benefit checks that it operates for the warm homes scheme. It has done over 3,000 benefit checks in the past year and has realised around £35 in benefits for each of those who were entitled to them. Therefore, the Bryson Group, through the provision of a commercial service, is also giving something back to the community.

Every constituency probably has examples of social economy enterprises. One of the foremost examples in my area of Strangford is Daisies Café, which works with people who are mentally ill or have learning difficulties and provides them with employment to allow them to develop their skills. The fantastic job that the cafe does was recently acknowledged when it received an award for the best social firm in the whole of Europe for working with people with learning disabilities. Therefore, right on our own doorstep, we have companies that are exemplars for the whole of Europe.

Like the Chairperson of the Enterprise, Trade and Investment Committee, I acknowledge the important contribution that the Ulster Community Investment Trust makes. We all know how unwilling banks are to lend money to even the most solvent businesses, and I am, therefore, sure that people from social economy enterprises do not get much opportunity to walk into banks and borrow money. UCIT, therefore, performs an absolutely essential function.

In the remaining time that I have left to speak, I wish to stress a couple of points. First, social enterprises are not going to be the panacea to all our economic ills — far from it. However, they can, where they operate most efficiently, be a route out of poverty for many because they are operating, by and large, in disadvantaged communities where there are a lot of vulnerable people. Those are communities that private companies — sometimes even the public sector — do not make any impact in. Social economy enterprises can provide people with employment, skills that they can take elsewhere, and, most importantly, an ability to get themselves out of poverty.

There are a lot of other things that I could say. However, in the future, we should be looking to not only grow the social economy sector but to grow it sustainably. It is not good enough

to have something that is just performing a social good. It must be sustainable. The best examples of social economy enterprises are big in scale and have an entrepreneurial attitude. The important ingredient is that those enterprises are profitable and that that profit is reinvested. However, that is only sustainable if the company is sustainable. Social economy enterprises cannot be sustained on the back of governmental or Peace funding or an artificial means of finance. The enterprise must be sustainable, because, without that, the sector will not grow in the way that we want it to.

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

Mr Hamilton: I welcome the motion and support social economy enterprises across Northern Ireland.

Mr Beggs: I support the motion, and I add my praise to the thousands of people who work and volunteer in the social economy sector. Such volunteering contributes to the success of many organisations.

A 2007 DETI survey found that, in addition to tens of thousands of volunteers, 30,000 to 40,000 people are directly employed by over 1,000 enterprises and contribute to an annual turnover of hundreds of millions of pounds, which is in the order of 5% of our local economy. Therefore, we are talking about very significant employers that contribute to our local economy.

I suspect that the enterprise agencies, which exist in each council area, are one of the most locally recognisable social enterprises. East Antrim has the Larne Enterprise Development Company (LEDCOM), Carrickfergus Enterprise Agency and Mallusk Enterprise Park, which serves the Newtownabbey area. I declare an interest, as my dad is an unpaid director of LEDCOM and I was formerly an unpaid director of Carrickfergus Enterprise Agency. Enterprise agencies operate on commercial lines, but they return any profits that they may have for community benefit. In the past, enterprise agencies have benefited from funding from councils, the Northern Ireland Executive and Europe, to enable them to provide competitively priced property for rental. That has encouraged more start-up businesses and been a vital source of flexibly leased accommodation space for new companies.

Enterprise agencies have provided training under the Go for It brand and other training programmes. As I said, any profits are invested, either by providing additional training to the local business community or by supporting further asset expansion. Undoubtedly, that contribution is enabling successful new businesses to start up, and we must acknowledge that. I hope that their property assets and the rental stream from those will assist their sustainability in the long term, now that Peace and other funding is drying up.

In my East Antrim constituency, Acceptable Enterprises provides employment to able-bodied and disabled people by fulfilling work contracts for local businesses. It provides worthwhile training and employment and the associated dignity to many local people.

One of the commonest forms of social enterprise is cafes that are run for charitable purposes. Training is often provided for people who have not been successful in gaining places elsewhere, and a social need in the local community is met. Dr B's Kitchen in the centre of Belfast is perhaps the most high profile of such cafes. However, there are lots of others in our constituencies, including Mango Tree at Greenisland Baptist Church and the Friendship Centre at Carrickfergus Methodist Church, which, to fulfil its name, provides a place in the community for people to meet over coffee and food.

One of the most successful enterprises that I have been associated with is Employers for Childcare. Marie Marin, its chief executive, initially gained some Peace funding to learn about good children-friendly business and employment practices in the United States of America.

She then built up the now self-sustaining social enterprise based on the childcare voucher system, which has National Insurance advantages for employers and employees. However, it was a rocky road, and, at one time, she feared that she may have to close. I advised her to cut back her application as tightly as possible to make its value for money more apparent. She did so, and her self-sustaining social enterprise does not now require public funding. She is ably supported by a commercially aware and experienced board. Hers is the only social enterprise in the UK that provides childcare vouchers.

12.30 pm

Other Members mentioned that Bryson House is a major player. However, we must take care. The sobering fact is that the indebtedness of our country and of European economies that were built on a property bubble means that we are on the verge of a period of government austerity, during which public spending will be severely cut.

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

Mr Beggs: Committees must scrutinise each line of every departmental budget to achieve maximum outputs from limited resources, so that funding may be available for cost-effective social economy projects.

Mr Neeson: I welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate and to give credit where credit is due. Jennifer McCann never misses an opportunity to raise the issue of the social economy at meetings of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment. I warmly congratulate her on highlighting the issue in the Assembly today.

It is not Question Time, but in response to a question from Simon Hamilton in 2008, the Minister stated that the sector had 6,700 paid workers, 5,000 volunteers and a turnover of more than £355 million. Will the Minister, bearing in mind the economic issues that we all face, update us on that situation?

I am aware of the Department's social economy strategy. The Executive, working with the social economy sector, including the social economy network, are committed to a range of actions that are designed to deliver three key strategic objectives: to increase awareness of the sector and establish its value to the local economy; to develop the sector and increase its business strength; and to create a supportive and enabling environment.

The social economy enterprise strategy includes actions that are designed to increase knowledge and understanding, provide support for business growth, build business skills, foster a SEE culture, and build the evidence base and measure the impact of SEEs. A key area of the strategy's work will be to establish the value of the social economy sector to the local economy.

Other Members gave examples of how various organisations, across Northern Ireland and nationally, have provided services to the

social economy. As a founding director of Carrickfergus Enterprise, I am only too aware of the contribution that the enterprise network has made to developing the social economy right across Northern Ireland. The review of public administration (RPA), if it ever goes ahead, could well have implications for that sector.

Across Departments, the definition of a social economy enterprise includes those organisations that have a social, community or ethical purpose. They operate using a commercial business model and are of a legal form that is appropriate to their not-for-personal-profit status. SEEs contribute to a fairer economy and society, and they can create opportunities and training for the most marginalised. That is an important contribution to a changing economic landscape, particularly in these tough economic times. In the current economic downturn, the role of SEEs and their ability to cushion its impact on the local economy will be more important than ever.

The Chairman of the Enterprise, Trade and Investment Committee raised the issue of financing. I agree with him that the credit unions will play an important role in that, but, equally, the banks must play their role. We are all too aware of the problems that many businesses face. Some businesses in my constituency have closed because banks did not contribute or help them out in difficult times and were not prepared to take a chance and assist companies.

The Governments in England and Scotland have been very active in assisting SEEs. We need to look at whether there is a need to develop special funds in Northern Ireland to assist SEEs.

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

Mr Neeson: The debate has been very useful, and I fully support the motion.

Mr Frew: Social enterprises, economic enterprises, community groups, co-operatives, voluntary groups and charities are very important to our lives, our community, our country and our economy. However, not everyone realises that, and they do not provide real benefits everywhere. Social enterprise can aid national recovery. We must increase awareness of the sector to develop its business strength and to provide a supportive environment in which it can prosper.

The social economy is very important, especially in the current economic downturn. However, there is significant work to be done to find the budget to support the social economy sector. Invest NI's social entrepreneurship programme (SEP), which has a three-year budget of about £2.5 million, assists social entrepreneurs in getting started. From June 2009 to March this year, 49 new social enterprises were established, with the creation of 107 new jobs. That has to be the start.

Countries that recognise and value social enterprise as part of the real economy can achieve significant growth in employment and output in the sector while addressing genuine social and environmental needs. The sector is underdeveloped and in need of appropriate support from within and from the wider policy and support infrastructure. The sector can be mainstreamed into the greater economy, and social enterprise can contribute to helping the country to work its way out of the current crisis. However, the sector must realise that it must work together if meaningful progress is to be achieved.

There are some examples of good practice in Broughshane, which is in my constituency. A very good community association has evolved into a social enterprise. There is a very good facility at Houston's Mill, which consists of offices to rent, the community office, two conference rooms, which the community groups can use, and a hydro scheme that generates 9 kW of green electricity. There is a tourist motorhome facility, where people can go into Broughshane and buy tokens from local businesses and be provided with electricity and sewerage facilities. There is also a greenhouse and a polytunnel, from which people can sell their wares. People can also support the local community in its ventures with regard to Britain in Bloom and other floral competitions.

Construction has commenced on a project called Broughshane House, which will provide three business units to rent out; community facilities for the local youth forum, which is important; and a credit union, which, as Members have already mentioned, is vital. A historical society will also be able to use that facility. With all that community activity, it is no coincidence that every retail unit in Broughshane is filled. It is also no coincidence that most of the young people in Broughshane and the Braid are engaged with the process and

the community. That will enable them to build confidence and create the ability to network through all our society, so, when they go into business, they will have a real concept of our social needs.

Mr Adams: Does the Member agree that Broughshane is a really great place?

Mr Frew: Broughshane is an absolutely fantastic place, I must add.

We are in the grip of recession, and Members have a duty to soften the blow to communities and businesses. We also have to plan for the recovery, and the social economy will be one aspect of that. The social economy is important; it is something that we will have to keep an eye on, and we must ensure that we give it the support it needs.

Mr Butler: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle.

I am glad to hear that the social economy is alive and well in Broughshane.

The debate started on a positive note, and I welcome the statement from Simon Hamilton that Sinn Féin MLAs can, from time to time, convince the DUP of the merits of the social economy. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Butler: I have two positive notes, and I will come to the Minister's contribution shortly.

Over the past number of years, the social economy's profile has grown from what it was in the 1990s and in the early years of this decade. I welcome that the Minister produced the 'Social Economy Enterprise Strategy 2009-2011' and that Richard Barnett referred to the social economy in his report on economic policy. He said that the social economy had a role to play in development and in enabling disadvantaged communities to manage in difficult economic times.

The strategy that the Minister and her Department came up with raised awareness of the social economy sector, helped to grow businesses and created a supportive environment to help the social economy grow. Those were welcome developments, and as a result of them, the social economy network (SEN) was set up. It was first called an interdepartmental steering group, but it is now known as the social economy policy group. A social economy forum has also been established. All those measures

highlighted by the Minister and her Department are welcome developments.

I hope that everyone can support the motion. It asks where the social economy sits in relation to the expected cuts in public spending and what role it will play in future. Under the review of public administration, some of the Department's roles with regard to entrepreneurship were to be transferred to local government. I hope that the Minister can tell us where those reforms sit, now that the review of public administration is stalled? Local government has an important role to play in developing the economy, particularly the social economy, as it is more in tune and has better ties with local people and communities.

Also, we need to know how this matter affects other Departments. The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment is not the only one involved. The Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) provides training facilities and tries to upskill people for work in the social economy. The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety plays a role in public procurement, and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development plays a role in dealing with the rural community. We need answers in those respects.

I welcome the fact that the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Development has raised the profile of the social economy, and good examples of that, such as Broughshane and the cafes, have been cited. We all know that the social economy plays an important role in looking after people with disabilities, helping them to gain employment and providing facilities for them. It also plays a similar role in recycling and addiction services in communities. We all look to some obvious social economy organisations, such as the credit unions, but there are others that are not so obvious. The GAA has played a significant role in promoting sport.

In this economic climate, the motion points to ways in which the Assembly can help communities to improve the development of the social economy. We need to know what stage the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment is at in developing the strategy that came out of the consultation document. We also need to know where local government and Departments will fit into the strategy in the times ahead.

12.45 pm

Mr Craig: I welcome the opportunity to contribute to the debate. The social economy is part and parcel of the growing, dynamic economy to which we all aspire. It can have a positive impact on people's lives in Northern Ireland, particularly in local communities in areas of economic disadvantage. It is vital that the social and economic enterprise be valued, encouraged and supported.

The social economy is a wide and diverse sector that has been operating and developing for many years. It has a strong tradition of supporting local communities in rural and urban areas. One successful group that comes to mind is the Bryson Charitable Group, previously known as Bryson House Enterprises. I listened with interest to a speech that was given at a fundraising event recently, in which it was stated that the group's turnover is now more than £20 million a year. It has more than 600 staff and has witnessed 22% growth over the past year. If any Member can point out to me any other company that saw that level of growth in the past year, it would be very welcome news.

In times of economic difficulty, it is vital that we try to continue developing such enterprises along with our own social economy, which is providing jobs for local people, as well as a range of other social benefits. As of June 2007, there were almost 400 social and economic enterprises in Northern Ireland, with 6,700 paid employees, 5,000 volunteers and a turnover of just over £355 million. I am pleased to see that Invest NI has been working in the social economy field by including enterprises in its Go For It campaign.

Invest NI launched its social enterprise programme in 2006 to help new and existing social economy enterprises. However, as Members said, a number of Departments have a role to play in the social development programme. Invest NI and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment play the key roles, but the Department of Finance and Personnel and its Central Procurement Directorate (CPD) also have a role to play in working with the sector to raise awareness of public tendering processes and to explore ways in which to deal with those processes. The Department for Social Development must take the lead on a range of strategies and dispense

advice on neighbourhood renewal, volunteering and other schemes.

I mentioned the Bryson Charitable Group, but I also wish to pay tribute to another of our local social enterprises, Voluntary Service Lisburn. It took a programme of refurbishing second-hand furniture and turned it into a thriving business in Lisburn. It now employs some 18 people. That goes to show what can be done with a social economy that benefits those who are worst off. Much of the work that Voluntary Service Lisburn does and the furniture that it overhauls benefits people who cannot afford new furniture. It is meeting a demand and helping employment in the Lisburn area.

The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development needs to support the sector through rural renewal and must encourage social enterprises to take advantage of the rural development programme. The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety can facilitate closer working relationships between social economy networks and the health and social care organisations. I know of a number of examples of social enterprises being developed in and around that area.

We must not forget the Department for Employment and Learning, which can fulfil a role in supporting social economy networks by providing training.

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

Mr Craig: You will be glad to know, Mr Speaker, that I commend the motion.

Mr Cree: Everyone talks about Northern Ireland's inflated public sector and underdeveloped private sector. However, we often forget about the social economy while it battles on in the background. Most businesses are profit-driven. Social enterprises are very different because any money that they make is reinvested in the community. Therefore, without the constant pressure of needing to satisfy a board of directors or shareholders with huge end-of-year profits, social enterprises can instead take decisions that have the best collective outcomes for local communities.

The social economy is important not just because it employs 30,000 workers and represents up to 8% of all economic activity here but because it plays a vital role in social

cohesion in the Province. Spanning economic activity in the community, voluntary and social enterprise sectors, the social economy has ethical values, including a commitment to local capacity building. It is accountable to its members and the wider community for its social, environmental and economic impacts.

Northern Ireland's Budget deficit stands at £7.3 billion, or 26% of GDP. That is in comparison to Greece's deficit of 14% of GDP. In facing that challenge, the speed of response to the impacts of the global recession has been a problem for every sector, not just the social economy sector. It should be noted that the social economy strategy that was launched in March this year takes little or no account of the impacts of the global recession. I am aware that a cross-departmental policy group is monitoring the delivery of the strategy and that an independent evaluation of the strategy will be undertaken early next year to assess its impact on the sector. Like others, I will watch closely to see what that group comes up with.

The social economy strategy needs more investment to put it on a par with those in England, Scotland and Wales, but where will that investment come from in the current economic climate, with the Executive facing cuts of £2 billion over the next four years? The Executive and the community and voluntary sector must reform together to deliver in extremely difficult circumstances. Effectively harnessing the public procurement process to social economy networks could build their capacity and help to grow employment and opportunity in the sector. That process must be continued and developed further. I am a great believer in harnessing departmental budgets to job creation to counter the impact of unemployment, particularly among the young, in our economy. According to a Committee for Finance and Personnel publication of February of this year, expenditure on public procurement by the Central Procurement Directorate and other centres of procurement expertise comes to some £2.4 billion a year, which is almost 25% of the Northern Ireland Executive's Budget.

I support the motion because I recognise the potential that the social economy has for our society, job creation and more effective public services. I encourage the harnessing of public procurement and building the capacity of social enterprises to that end.

Mr Givan: I support the motion. If I had to describe myself, I would call myself a capitalist with a social conscience. I am certainly in favour of private enterprise; it will take us out of this recession. I am not opposed to big business doing well or to shareholders receiving a good dividend, but we should put more focus and pressure on those companies to have at their heart a social conscience so that they contribute back to society from the money that they make.

Tesco receives the largest intake of any store in my constituency. When we ask it to make a contribution of £5,000 to the city centre management team, it refuses to do so. However, small retailers and other companies contribute to that organisation. Smaller local companies are often more inclined to put their hands in their pockets to support council initiatives, whereas large firms are somewhat reticent. It is important that big businesses hear the message that they need to have a social conscience.

I support the social economy because, at its heart, it aims to put the money that it generates back into the community. Good examples of such organisations in Lisburn include Voluntary Service Lisburn, which renews and sells old furniture. It takes in people, often from difficult backgrounds, gives them a skill, trains them and helps them to go on to find other employment, so it makes a good contribution to the social economy.

Our Minister is committed to the social economy. A couple of weeks ago, I attended a launch in the Long Gallery at which she was the keynote speaker, and I am sure that she will voice her personal support for that section of our economy. The DUP has made the social economy a priority. There has been investment, and the party is committed to the social economy.

Other Members mentioned that companies or, for that matter, government could look at their procurement practices. Social clauses that are related to procurement and bringing in employees from local areas are incorporated into the Maze proposals, which is a welcome development. Where there is major, significant investment by government, I support the insertion of social clauses into agreements, but I would not support it in a way that would stifle competition or people coming forward with the best possible prices for such schemes. I

support the motion. We are doing what we can, and the social economy will remain a focus for our party as we go forward.

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mrs Foster): As has been said by many Members, this debate about the social economy is timely, not least because a lot of opportunities are available to the social economy sector and to small and medium-sized enterprises at present. The Government are asking themselves how to do things differently, and the social economy can assist in answering. I have been talking to the sector about that.

As suggested in the motion, the social economy makes a hugely positive and important contribution to Northern Ireland's overall economy. Mr Cree pointed out that about 8% of economic activity in Northern Ireland can be linked to the social economy. Therefore, I will take a few minutes to outline the sector's importance, our strategy for developing it, future opportunities and, lastly, investment in the sector.

As the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, I am well aware that growing a dynamic and innovative economy here involves the continued development of the social economy sector, which has economic activity and employment potential for us. From across the House, from Members representing most constituencies, we heard about the social benefits that the social economy brings to each area. The prize must go to Mr Frew from North Antrim for getting in so many mentions of Broughshane. It would be remiss of me not to mention the ARC healthy living centre in Irvinestown, which was the recipient of the first social enterprise mark in Northern Ireland, an award that continues to grow and is being given to social enterprises across Northern Ireland.

As I said, social enterprises play a significant role in regenerating areas of high social need by generating sources of income, promoting innovation and helping to create sustainable and cohesive communities. I will say more later about sustainability, an issue that was raised by Mr Hamilton.

As the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, I have had the opportunity and the pleasure to visit many social enterprises throughout Northern Ireland to witness at first hand the big difference that such businesses make to their local communities, particularly in areas of economic disadvantage. If our

communities are to survive the tough times ahead, our combined efforts must focus on increasing economic prosperity in and between communities and looking at ways to achieve greater social connectivity.

Mr Frew said that the sector needs to work together. I argue that not only does the sector need to work with other social enterprises but it needs to work across sectoral boundaries. Indeed, when I visited Employers for Childcare in the Lagan Valley constituency, that organisation made the valid point that it was not until the private sector came on to its board of directors that it really started to see a difference in its profits. More profits meant that more money could be ploughed into the business.

1.00pm

Social enterprises provide a wide range of invaluable services in the most disadvantaged areas of Northern Ireland. Many have a particular value in creating employment and training opportunities for some of the most marginalised people and in encouraging the use of sustainable business models, not for personal profit but for profit for the wider community. That is a particularly important financial model in the current financial climate, where it is increasingly difficult to maintain current levels of mainstream government funding. In these difficult economic times, the benefits of a vibrant social economy sector are particularly important, and social enterprises will have a vital role to play as we work hard to grow and strengthen the Northern Ireland economy even in these austere times.

Mr Neeson asked about the number of people who are employed in the sector. The most recent audit was carried out in 2007, so we do not have up-to-date figures on that. The figures that the Member related are the most up-to-date. Once the strategy rolls out, we will have to revisit that and see how many people are employed in the sector.

Earlier this year, I launched the cross-departmental social economy enterprise strategy, which was developed to ensure that the sector is valued, encouraged and supported. The strategy represents the Executive's wholehearted endorsement and commitment to ensuring that social enterprises play a full and valued role in the local economy. It is important to say, as Members recognised, that the issue does not belong only to DETI. It belongs right across

Departments and, indeed, as Mr Butler said, to local government.

As I understand it, strategy and policy are to remain with the Department, including the social economy forum. Local government will have representatives on that forum, and, hopefully, they will represent the interests of councils at that time. In addition, the working out of the social economy at local level will be taken forward by community planning. Therefore, if community planning goes down to local councils, that function will follow as well.

My Department has a leading role. We formulate the strategy and chair the meetings, and, as has been mentioned, a wide range of other Departments have a role. In particular, DARD has a role on the rural economy, and I know that that Department has made grants to local social economies. The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, the Department for Social Development, Invest Northern Ireland, DEL and the Department of Finance and Personnel also have roles.

An integral element of the strategy is to develop the role of the social economy in the delivery of public policies with a future focus on the contribution that the sector can make to the effective, efficient and equitable delivery of public services to communities across Northern Ireland. Recently, I had the pleasure of attending the Social Economy Network's 'Meet the Buyer' event. I had an opportunity to meet up to 30 local social economy enterprises, which work across a wide range of services and make a varied and distinctive contribution, often in areas of greatest need. I was hugely impressed by the scope and quality of the entrepreneurs whom I met, and it is those organisations that have so much to offer in combating the current economic climate. I was also encouraged by CPD's participation, with its workshop on accessing public contracts and the sector's high level of interest in learning more about how to go about securing new businesses.

I will talk briefly in a few minutes about the Executive's investment in the sector and about initiatives that the sector itself has taken. First, however, I want to say a few words about the opportunities that the sector has to make a real difference to our local economy. Access to public procurement opportunities is an area of huge importance to the sector, as Members on the opposite Benches mentioned. As mentioned

earlier, much good work is already being taken forward with CPD. Members will be aware of the Committee for Finance and Personnel's 'Report on the Inquiry into Public Procurement in Northern Ireland', which was published in February this year. Many of the inquiry's recommendations relate not only to small businesses but to the social economy sector. The recommendations include increasing access to and awareness of procurement opportunities, greater consistency and standardisation of processes and the production of additional guidance for social enterprises and procurement practitioners. A number of the Committee's recommendations are already under way as part of an ongoing process of service development. A progress report on the action plan that CPD developed to address the Committee's recommendations is due to be presented to the procurement board in November this year.

Recently, I launched a DETI/Invest NI-supported social economy masterclass series of six themed and professionally organised events to help raise awareness of the sector across different areas that, perhaps, people may not automatically think of whenever the social economy is mentioned. The first event related to tourism, and there will be workshops on health, environment and recycling, culture and regeneration, human and social capital, and physical and financial capital. I hope that MLAs will have the time and the opportunity to go along to some of the remaining masterclasses.

Given the increased pressure on future public sector budgets, the focus in our new strategy is on ensuring that Departments make sure that their existing financial and other business support programmes are widely publicised and, indeed, readily accessible to social enterprises. Considerable resources that the sector can access are highlighted in the strategy. DETI funds the SEN as a representative body of the social economy sector through a letter of offer of up to £600,000. I have to say that that organisation is pivotal to the development of the sector, with over 170 business members.

Last June, I launched Invest NI's social entrepreneurship programme. That programme helps potential social entrepreneurs to start a business, and it has a budget of £2.3 million. It also encourages existing social enterprises to grow by funding innovation and enterprise. I am particularly pleased to tell the House about the success of the revamped SEP during its

first year of operation. A total of 46 new social enterprises have been financially assisted to become established. They all received business and development advice through our programme. Between them, those new businesses have created 107 new jobs and have a projected turnover of over £3 million in their first year of trading. Invest NI provided financial support of about £200,000 to 40 social enterprises, which resulted in almost £7 million of additional leverage, including resources provided by the community groups.

Alongside SEP, UCIT has identified the flexible enterprise fund worth up to £250,000 as an offer within the SEP support package. That provides flexible working capital assistance to social enterprise start-ups alongside my start-up grant that is available with the SEP.

Outside DETI, DSD, through programmes such as neighbourhood renewal and the modernisation fund capital programme, has also been able to provide funding. As I said, by working with the Social Economy Network and the rural network, DARD has been able to offer grants and support through axis 3 of the rural development programme.

An important aspect of considering future finance for the sector is the need to look to alternative options of funding to ensure the sector's future sustainability and growth. I draw Members' attention to a couple of initiatives that the sector itself is taking. Two weeks ago, I was delighted to announce a new partnership between UCIT and Big Issue Invest, giving local social economies access to the £10 million investment loan fund to help to facilitate new investment opportunities for social economy businesses right across the United Kingdom. I think that Ms McCann mentioned the fact that the Big Issue Invest fund is available on the mainland, but it is of course also available in Northern Ireland.

The social enterprise investment fund is an excellent example of creative and innovative collaboration, in which UCIT's investment of £250,000 will leverage significant additional investment and create access to new finance for the sector. Another example of how the sector is taking the initiative is the recent decision by Charity Bank and UCIT, as the two main social finance providers in Northern Ireland, to commission a consultancy project, to be

published next summer, to review social finance supply and demand in Northern Ireland.

Members can be assured that my officials and I are happy to work in partnership in any further initiatives aimed at ensuring that the sector continues to have access to adequate sources of funding to ensure its continued development. Through co-operation and partnership, we can achieve the vision for the development of the social economy in Northern Ireland, as set out in our social economy enterprise strategy.

I encourage my Executive colleagues to continue to support the fund and to attach importance to the future development of the social economy sector when looking at their budgets and talking about resourcing priorities. Someone told me recently that I am becoming known as the social economy Minister rather than the economy Minister because I have devoted quite a bit of my time in office to the sector. I make no apologies for that. I think that it can make a real difference to Northern Ireland, and I know that the House agrees with that.

Mr McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I welcome the contributions from all parties. It is clear that there is existing and significant capital of mutual interest and appreciation of the benefits that arise from social economy activity across the North. We genuinely have a voice at the Executive table to represent the sector, and I welcome the Minister's remarks today.

The motion and tomorrow's motion on the green new deal, which I also find welcome, send out a clear indication that the Assembly collectively recognises the pressure — some might say “the assault” — on our economy. Growing a dynamic and innovative economy was agreed as the key Executive priority, for which the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, Arlene Foster, had lead responsibility. Given the global economic downturn, that was a difficult and unenviable challenge, and questions have emerged as to whether the Assembly ever had the necessary power or tools in its toolkit to deliver on that. Nonetheless, I strongly support that as the number one priority and identify myself with the valiant efforts of the Minister and her Executive colleagues to address the issue. Factors outside our control will continue to dominate, but the discussion today —

Mr Campbell: Will the Member give way?

Mr McLaughlin: Yes, of course.

Mr Campbell: To allow Executive Ministers to fight the good fight to get the necessary resources for the people of Northern Ireland in order to get the economy right, does the Member agree with me that it is appropriate that all Ministers pull in the same direction publicly and privately?

1.15 pm

Mr McLaughlin: I do indeed. I do not want to introduce a sour note, but it would be helpful if Ministers approached genuine cost-saving initiatives such as the Education and Skills Authority (ESA) and the RPA on the basis of the moneys that could be freed up to enhance our ability to meet the Programme for Government objectives. I have been critical in recent days, but I welcome the fact that Ministers are now addressing our economic pressures in a more uniform way and are defending this region from the worst excesses of the slash-and-burn approach that emanates from Westminster. That is to the good. There is more work to be done. I take the Member's point: it is not helpful if Ministers are not in a position to act collectively. I strongly welcome our move to that position. I come back to the topic of the motion: there is unanimity as regards the fact that that is the standard or threshold that we have to achieve across the entire economic debate and, indeed, the entire policy portfolio that each Minister has to deliver.

The fact that Ministers are addressing the issues now will be reflected in how the social partners respond. Each of us can cite examples of the contribution that has been made. The statistics that have been quoted for the Social Economy Network's roster of accredited organisations understate the reality. The figure may not include some significant social economy projects that are reinvesting in developing social capital. Indeed, the figure could turn out to be three times the 400 that SEN quoted. The employment that that generates could also be quantified significantly and exponentially. That process will continue.

The question is whether we are doing all that we can within the powers that we have. The strategy that the Minister spoke about today is a clear indication that we are alive to our responsibilities. There are moves to give the credit union movement, which already contributes significantly to the social economy,

additional opportunities to elaborate on and develop that function. It will obviously require legislation and guidelines and co-ordination between here and Westminster, but the Minister is addressing that. I am a bit frustrated about how long it takes and by the fact that such extended consultation is involved. It has emerged as an initiative for this region, and it is one that could be developed much more quickly.

I would have liked to hear the Minister comment on the banks. The banks have been the subject of significant examination and criticism in recent times, which, in my opinion, is well deserved. They have also, of course, received hugely significant public investment, and we will all be asked to pay for that. I do not see the banks stepping up to the plate as regards their social corporate responsibility. When we talk about giving additional resource, it is fair enough for us, as an Assembly, to look across all our Departments and task them with identifying where they can assist. We are getting a generally positive response. I have no doubt that more initiatives will emerge and more opportunities will be responded to over time, if it does not happen in the meantime.

Organisations such as UCIT have demonstrated their value and their ability to run a social business in a responsible way. Their books balance, and they have assets. The banks could respond to UCIT's call for a sustainable, identifiable and reliable revenue stream. UCIT wanted a 10-year agreement with the four main banks, but it has not happened, and I do not understand why. The employment and, in particular, the social capital, which is difficult to quantify financially, that would accrue would be invaluable to our community. Perhaps the Minister could take a look at that issue. She has demonstrated her commitment to the social economy, generally, and there is a case to be pressed with the banks. I know that we have no devolved authority over the banks. However, the banks make a lot of noise about their social corporate responsibility. I would like them to put their money where their mouth is, particularly in respect of the social economy.

Finally, I thank all the Members who spoke on the motion. Clearly, it is not just a matter of mother and apple pie; it is a genuine benefit to our community right across the board. We are speaking about mutual benefit and mutual understanding, and perhaps there is a lesson

there for us to learn when considering wider policy issues.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly recognises the positive contribution that the social economy makes to growing the economy, creating employment opportunities and regenerating communities; and calls on the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to ensure that the social economy remains a priority and that it is given adequate financial investment, resources and support.

Private Members' Business

Property Fraud in Europe

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

Mr Kennedy: I beg to move

That this Assembly notes with concern the number of people from Northern Ireland who have been victims of property fraud in the European Union and Turkey; calls on the First Minister and deputy First Minister, working with Northern Ireland's MEPs, to make representations to the European Commission to take more definitive action to protect property buyers, to raise awareness of the problems associated with property fraud and to urge the countries concerned to better regulate property companies working within their jurisdictions.

I am pleased to have this opportunity to propose this motion, which draws attention to the very real plight of a great many people — potentially thousands — throughout Northern Ireland who have experienced problems when purchasing property in the European Union and in countries such as Turkey.

Mention of the European Union makes it possible for me to pay a glowing tribute to the performance of the Ryder Cup European team, who, as we speak, are trying to wrestle the Ryder Cup back from the Americans. I think that the whole House will want to congratulate in particular our local players, G Mac and Wee Mac, as they have been called. I very much hope that they will take home the trophy. Besides that, their performances have been excellent, and they have done the people of Northern Ireland proud.

I am sure that, in recent years, every Member in the House has been approached by constituents who have suffered as a result of the credit boom turning to bust, with a significant fall in the availability of personal credit. Personal debt has risen, and many are suffering from untold stress and pressure as bills mount up. My party colleague Jim Nicholson MEP has been contacted by a great many constituents from across Northern Ireland and, indeed, by British expatriates from across the UK who

have invested tens or hundreds of thousands of pounds in properties abroad.

Many people bought property at a time when credit was much easier to obtain than it is today. For many, a second home in the sun is a dream, and some of those who sought to purchase property did so as an investment opportunity, to supplement their income or pension or simply to retire to the sun. Some spent upwards of £100,000 or £200,000 and have literally nothing to show for it. I am concerned that more definitive action has not been taken by the EU to date, despite widespread efforts.

In Spain, complex zoning laws and urbanisation policies have meant that some properties are seized without any compensation. Some people purchased homes through the Spanish legal system, using legal representation, yet, in certain instances, it has subsequently transpired that the properties were in breach of laws designed to prevent development too close to the coastline, and, therefore, those properties were retrospectively deemed to have been constructed illegally. Essentially, those people legally purchased illegally built houses, so thousands of them have been and are being stripped of their property rights without explanation or legal redress or, indeed, compensation. Some people are waiting for the imminent demolition of their home, not knowing when it will happen.

I understand that some 400,000 householders in Spain are affected, and around 80% of them are Spanish. Some town halls in Spain gave planning permission that was on the fringes of legality, and in some cases the authorities have charged the property owners for the installation of local infrastructure even after the owners lost their properties. In other European Union countries, such as Bulgaria, and countries outside the EU, such as Turkey, the problems associated with the purchase of property appear to be slightly different from those experienced in Spain. Some constituents who bought in Turkey, for example, did not receive title deeds or take possession of the property. The property was then sold to a third party who took possession and ownership. In Bulgaria, some developers of unfinished properties took out mortgages against them. When they ended up in great financial difficulty, they took the properties with them.

Other problems include buildings being constructed without licences — strange, that, I

am sure — and lawyers taking advantage of the power of attorney to manipulate the buyer. In some instances, people bought off-plan in large developments, but the promised facilities and infrastructure were never built. Worryingly, we also heard about collusion between developers, lenders and lawyers, which means that no one acts in the interests of the purchaser. Large deposits and lifelong savings are lost, and the purchaser receives nothing.

Unfortunately, title deed trap fraud, as I mentioned in connection with Turkey, appears to be common. That involves the deed not being released to the new owner after purchase, which means that third parties can then remortgage or resell the property. That makes it impossible for the original owner to gain possession of their property.

It seems to be commonplace for purchasers to be asked to pay a large deposit, sometimes half the value of the property, with a mortgage for the remainder due on completion. The local lender then makes it difficult or impossible for the purchaser to get a mortgage. As a result, people are told by some developers that they are in breach of contract for non-completion, and they lose substantial deposits.

Many people bought in good faith and, unfortunately, were duped by hard-sell tactics. It should be noted that many people tried earnestly and did their utmost to do everything by the book. They did all the usual things that we do here when thinking about buying a home, such as making property inspections prior to the purchase and consulting solicitors. Furthermore, some companies appear to have targeted consumers with little or no experience of overseas investment and little knowledge of the separation that should exist between the estate agent, the developer, the mortgage broker and the lawyer.

Huge growth was promised in countries such as Bulgaria after they joined the EU, so people were encouraged to buy early to reap the benefits. They were promised a buoyant rental market, future development in the immediate locale and forthcoming bans on any further building. Novice investors were targeted, and many suffered untold difficulty. People have hit an economic wall, and for those who invested so much money abroad with nothing to show for it —

Mr F McCann: What you say is interesting because the issue affects thousands of people.

The motion calls for an appeal to the EU, but the travelling exhibitions here that sell property abroad also pose many difficulties because they explain nothing to people and use the hard sell. To avoid such pitfalls, can we do anything here to ensure that people are given the proper information in the first instance?

The Antrim camogie team won the junior all-Ireland title yesterday; I am sure that you wish them well.

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his contribution and for making an important point. As well as, I hope, providing legal assistance at some stage, the best that we can do is to advise people to source properly any likely purchase and to take proper and sensible legal advice. That is crucial. There is mounting support for action from all parties and all EU countries, and pressure is coming from Europe to clean up the whole system.

Members are also keen to raise support for the victims. MEPs are working together, but more needs to be done. We are keen that the Assembly and the Executive lobby the European Commission to take more definitive action to protect property buyers, to raise awareness of the problems associated with property fraud, and to urge the countries concerned to better regulate property companies working in their jurisdictions. We want to ensure that EU citizens all over Europe and beyond who choose to invest or to move abroad can do so with confidence in the future. I propose the motion.

1.30 pm

Mr Weir: I support the motion. I notice that Mr McCann has just left the Chamber. I do not know whether, when he originally heard that there was a motion about Turkey coming up in the Chamber, he was severely disappointed by the content of the motion and therefore felt a need to leave. I will explain that one to the proposer of the motion at a later stage.

I am happy to support the motion. Like the proposer of the motion, if I had been told a while ago that I would be spending the day looking at the intricate details of calling for action in Europe, I would have thought that it might have had something to do with the Ryder Cup team, because, to be fair, it is about the one time every two years that I support something coming from Europe. Nevertheless, this is something that the House can unite

around. Initially, the motion that was submitted also had Mr Paisley Junior's name on it.

A number of constituents across Northern Ireland have been the innocent victims of property fraud. As Mr Kennedy highlighted, a number of people have sought to find an additional house in the sun. I am not sure why they did not come to north Down and look for accommodation in Bangor or Millisle, for instance; but, for some reason, some of them have looked further afield.

The people who made those investments are not greedy or gullible. In many instances, they have scrimped and saved throughout their lives and have lived frugally. They may have been looking for a second home or, rather than getting caught in get-rich-quick schemes, looked at investment in property, which most experts say, in the long run, tends to be the safest investment. It accumulates most, and it is a very sensible investment for the future.

However, as the proposer of the motion highlighted, the people who made those investments have been let down badly by two separate sources. First, they have been let down by the actions of the Spanish Government and the threat that they appear to be imposing, particularly on some coastal areas. We should remember that approximately one million people in the UK and the Irish Republic have property in Spain or are living there. This is not a marginal issue; it affects large numbers of people, potentially. Secondly, a more sinister approach is being adopted by various people in EU countries and outside the EU — in Turkey — who have been perpetrating fraud on local people.

Anyone who looks into the issue will see that one of the most disturbing aspects is that the perpetrators of the fraud are not doing it from a long distance. In most cases, someone from another part of the UK, from Northern Ireland, or the Republic, has acted as a middleman and may well be part of the fraud. We need to be careful with some of these matters because, in some cases, the issues are before the court. Nevertheless, unfortunately, those middlemen have helped to reel some people into the property fraud.

We support the motion. Clearly, it is important that the EU takes action. Reference was made to Mr Nicholson; and our MEP, Mrs Dodds, also raised the issue. It is important that through our MEPs and through the Office of the First

Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM), we work with the EU to try to resolve those issues. I do not think that the answer lies in land-grabbing from the European Union to take control of property rights. However, MEPs can apply pressure on Governments. Recently, in the European Parliament, a Green MEP got a motion passed essentially saying that any subsidies going to Spain should be held back until the issue is properly resolved because of the impact that it is having on European citizens.

Similarly, given that Turkey is seeking to join the European Union, one point of leverage for the EU would be to exert pressure on Turkey's Government, before consideration is given to membership, to ensure that people are treated fairly and properly and that such scams are dealt with. Whatever other considerations there are with regard to Turkey's membership, this should be a red-line issue, and it should be dealt with before Turkey joins the EU.

The House can unite on the motion. Citizens from all constituencies and backgrounds have been defrauded. The House should state with a clear voice that enough is enough. Let us see some action.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Agus beidh muid ag tacú leis an rún seo. I rise to support this timely motion. I thank the proposers who brought it to the House. When Danny Kennedy proposed the motion, he referred to the European Ryder Cup team and local participants. He forgot to mention Pádraig Harrington, Darren Clarke and Paul McGinley, who have also played a sterling role in the victory that we hope will come this afternoon.

Mr Kennedy: At present, it is 12 — 9.

Mr McCartney: There is not much time to go, then.

The motion has three broad aims: to protect property buyers; to raise awareness of problems associated with property fraud; and to better regulate companies in European member states and other countries. There is a role for our three MEPs to play. Indeed, there is a role for any MEP to play who is prepared to give support. Obviously, OFMDFM has a role to play to brief MEPs to ensure that the matter is raised at the highest level in the EU. In the first instance, EU countries must be made aware that many people in Ireland, both in the North and in the South, have fallen foul to that problem.

People have been affected in different ways. The media have highlighted cases of people who have set out with bogus and fraudulent claims to entice people to invest in property in Europe and elsewhere. They have not spelt out the possible pitfalls and dangers. Indeed, they could be seen to be involved in the scams.

As Fra McCann mentioned, all Members have a role to play locally. When such cases come to local attention in the media, there is a sense that people get poor advice. Sometimes, people see advertisements in which everything appears to be bona fide. However, when they explore further or, perhaps, when they hand over the first part of their deposit, they are enticed to spend more and more money. Then, they find themselves in a bureaucratic or legal maze that is particular to the country concerned. Perhaps, the agent acted in good faith. However, local building regulations and Government controls in other countries can create dangers and pitfalls.

Today, a story on Radio Foyle, which I believe was also carried by Radio Ulster, revealed that people now rent properties in other countries through various websites. However, when they travel to those countries, they find that the villas do not exist or are not up to the standard that they expected when they paid their money; sometimes, upfront. Therefore, there is a need to try to ensure that the Assembly's role is co-ordinated and that MEPs are briefed properly, so that the motion will have teeth and will not be merely aspirational.

Many people must seek advice on this issue and, unfortunately, a great deal of it is legal advice. When properties are in other jurisdictions, that advice becomes extremely difficult.

The most important point is that the European Union has a role to play, particularly in regulating companies that have set themselves up as the middlemen between investment companies and buyers. When evidence shows that those companies do not act properly or in good faith, the European Union has a role to impose sanctions on them or, at least, put pressure on Governments to ensure that investment and property companies do exactly what they advertise in order to entice people to invest their hard-earned money. As Peter Weir said, the situation is not simply down to speculators. Many of the people who invested are on the verge of retirement; they put aside some money and looked on the investment as a long-term

settlement on which they could call when they might want to leave Ireland to live in another country or through which their family could enjoy the fruits of their labour. We support and welcome the motion.

Mrs D Kelly: I congratulate the proposers of the motion. It is depressing to read the information packs that have been prepared by Research and Library Services. Not only have many people lost out on their dream homes and their potential nest eggs, but, as Mr Kennedy said, the greed and corruption have led to the suffering of the indigenous populations of Spain, Turkey and eastern Europe. The illegal planning and urbanisation of many of the areas in which those people had hoped to live and work have drawn up property prices, and that has made it difficult for indigenous populations to purchase. It seems to have been a lose-lose situation all round, except for those engaged in the deceit.

Submissions made to the European Parliament suggest that many are passing the buck. If the Commission and the Parliament are asked questions, they respond that it is up to the domestic authorities to regulate and control matters in their jurisdictions. Clearly, that is not happening. When people seek the help of the European Parliament on the basis of their human right to family life and privacy, they are let down by the Parliament, which says that they first have to check out the regulations in their own jurisdictions. There is merit in seeking assistance from the MEPs who represent us in Europe and who represent all the people who have lost out so cruelly over recent years. Their view is that the Parliament is not taking the issue seriously enough and not doing enough to assist them.

The motion also calls on the First Minister and deputy First Minister to work alongside the MEPs, which is where the work needs to be done. It is clear that the MEPs can work jointly, and they will not be alone. There are only three MEPs in the North, but the issue goes across many jurisdictions, such as GB and the Republic of Ireland, and I am sure that many citizens from other European countries purchased property in another jurisdiction only to have been defrauded out of their nest egg. MEPs across Europe who wish to represent their citizens in trying to get justice should have a common approach. The MEPs and the First Minister and deputy First Minister should sit down and work

on a campaign and plan of action to do that. I support the motion.

Dr Farry: I welcome the motion. On the theme of the Ryder Cup, it is fair to say that the lack of business today may be an opportunity for Members to catch the grand finale. On a serious point, it is somewhat concerning, three weeks from the comprehensive spending review, that business here is dominated by private Members' business and is set to finish very early. However, I appreciate that that is not the fault of the Speaker.

It has been an interesting debate so far, in part for what it has revealed. By that, I mean much more than Peter Weir paying a compliment to a Green Party MEP. It has exposed a lack of proper engagement with the European Union from political parties in Northern Ireland and in the Assembly. There are parties here that are openly Euro-sceptic, at best, and, at worst, Euro-hostile. However, today we have a motion that all parties support, which clearly demonstrates not only the need for the European Union but an expansion of the European Union and a deepening of its powers. If some parties are now having a road-to-Damascus conversion, the Alliance Party will certainly welcome that.

1.45 pm

Property fraud and the wider issues relating to the lack of proper legal regulation and protection are clearly matters of interest and concern to the Assembly, and, indeed, they affect the people of Northern Ireland. That reflects a much wider and welcome situation in that we are living in a transnational world. People from Northern Ireland and other parts of the UK and these islands are doing business overseas, living overseas, working overseas and playing overseas as tourists, or, indeed, in sporting competitions. We all stand to benefit from that movement of people. As people leave these shores to go overseas, people from the rest of Europe will come here, and all our economies will grow as a consequence.

The fundamental reality of transnationalism demonstrates the need for a body such as the European Union and co-operation between states. As regards the expansion of the European Union, if property fraud is a problem in Turkey, that is yet another argument as to why Turkey should be admitted to the European Union. If we are not serious about supporting Turkey's accession to the European Union, what

happens to property in Turkey will be beyond our reach. It is my understanding that there are parties here that are hostile to Turkey joining the European Union, given that it does not fit the traditional definition of our European home. I reject that, and hopefully others will, too. If we are serious about tackling the problem in Turkey, let us get them in, and then we can work through regulations to ensure that property fraud is not a reality for our citizens when they try to buy property and live overseas.

Another issue is how the European Union deals with property fraud. My understanding is that the problem is that the European Union has limited competency in that area. Issues such as privacy, competition and proper regulation of the internal market are all legitimate issues for the European Commission and European Parliament, but issues relating to land use and property are essentially matters for member states.

I am certainly open to a shift in the balance of power and to the European Commission being able to address those types of issues and create regulations through the proper democratic process. However, we have to be clear in the House that, if that is what we want — to be perfectly clear, that is the implicit thrust of the motion — that means that, in turn, the European Union will have a greater say over affairs in the UK, and, indeed, in Northern Ireland. I would welcome that development — I think that we would all benefit from it — but there are parties here that are riding two horses with respect to the issue. Hopefully, today's debate will be a turning point and will lead us to recognise the true nature of the interests that we have in common with the rest of the European Union. The motion is a clear example of that, and, given that it deals with such a serious issue, hopefully it will lead us down that path.

Mr Spratt: To respond to Mr Farry's comments, let me say that the support for the motion from those of us on this side of the House should not be seen as a ringing endorsement of the European Union or of lots of the things that happen within it. The concern from Members on these Benches is for the many constituents who have invested money in property. As Peter Weir said, much of that money has been hard-earned; it has not come from investing in properties of that type. Constituents, many of whom are retired, have come to me on this issue. They had always wanted a place in the sun.

They worked hard all their lives and put small amounts of money into properties in Spain and other places only to find that they had been duped by the people concerned.

Many of the things that I wanted to say have already been said, and I do not intend to go over those issues just for the sake of it. I will say that the Union has been involved in a number of directives and has laid down rules, but when it comes to enforcing some of those rules, as is the case with much that is in European directives, little is done.

One issue that has not been raised today is that some of the scams start in the Province. One case — I do not want to go into it, because it is and will be the subject of court proceedings — is particularly interesting and has been given high priority in the press recently. In actual fact, I think that it was the press that initially raised the alarm about the property scam. Many of the creditors in the case, who put hundreds of thousands of pounds into the operation, have now issued a creditor's petition to try to bankrupt the individual concerned. It is also interesting that many of the cases involve fraud and are being dealt with here at home. One particular case involves over 171 fraud charges relating to some £4 million of local people's money. Those charges come under the Theft Act (Northern Ireland) 1969 and the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002. That is just one case, but there have been many others.

I think that it was Mr McCann who made an intervention about the number of hard-sell shows that we see on a weekly basis in hotels around the Province. I know that some of them are legitimate and genuine. However, local people need to ask a lot of questions before they become involved in any such developments. I know folks who invested in a development in Morocco in the hope that they would get a property, when, in actual fact, planning permission for the complex had never even been applied for. It is, therefore, important that local people check things out, in a legal sense and in every other sense. That warning needs to be given.

I congratulate the Members who brought the motion to the House, because the issue affects many people. I know that Diane Dodds has been dealing with many such cases, and I am sure that all our MEPs are doing that. I am, therefore, also sure that any encouragement that OFMDFM

can give to our Members of the European Parliament in trying to assist constituents throughout the Province will be very welcome. The constituents affected come from every section of the community, and the fact that everybody is unified around the motion today shows that that is the case.

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

Mr Spratt: I support the motion.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle agus ba mhaith liom tacaíocht a thabhairt don rún seo fosta. I, too, support the motion, proposed by Danny Kennedy, and welcome the fact that it has been brought to the Assembly. In a way, the motion is about EU engagement almost as much as it is about an injustice suffered by local people who have been victims of fraud. The OFMDFM Committee undertook a major inquiry into EU engagement and recommended increased engagement and formal working arrangements between the Assembly and our three MEPs in the North. That is inherent in the motion.

Essentially, we are talking about people who were caught out by unscrupulous builders who typically sell properties without planning permission, access being secured and the necessary utilities. Like other Members, I identify the fact that Bairbre de Brún MEP has been working on the issue and has met a number of people who have been affected in the North. However, time out of number, we are told by the European Council that the issue is beyond its competence. MEPs, such as Mairead McGuinness, often table questions about the issue, and they get an answer that is always along the lines of the following: "We are speaking to the member state, but it is not within the EU's competence but that of the member state to address the issue". Therefore, we need to work collectively to bring pressure to bear and to defend the local people involved, who, I agree, have not been greedy or gullible but who have worked hard, saved money all their working lives and invested their hard-earned savings in such properties.

Earlier, I spoke to a constituent who has been affected by European property fraud. He told me that, at a meeting in Belfast to discuss the issue, it came out that over 100 people were affected. He told me that a regional committee of 12 was formed to represent those 100-plus

people. Jimmy Spratt made the point that those people come from all our constituencies. The individual who I spoke to said that, on the regional committee, there is representation from Silverbridge to Newtownards. People are also seeking legal advice and taking legal action on the matter. It is my understanding that, in one case in Spain, the ownership of the land involved had not been secured by the property company, which then went about selling properties to local people.

We are all arguing for better regulation. If the EU is to mean anything, it has to up the standards throughout the European Union and then harmonise them.

Fra McCann pointed out, interestingly, that travelling advertisement roadshows take place locally. There needs to be greater monitoring of those roadshows and of what they are advertising, and it must be asked whether the advertisers are being wholly honest.

The motion talks about raising awareness. I will speak privately to the other members of the OFMDFM Committee about getting the regional committee that has been established locally to come before us to see what added value that we, as a Statutory Committee, could bring to bear. It is my understanding that there are 12 members on that regional committee and that it represents over 100 people. Therefore, it would be a good idea for the OFMDFM scrutiny Committee to hear directly from those people about their range of experiences.

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

I mentioned Fra McCann earlier. He, quite shamelessly, congratulated the Antrim camogie team on winning a big match yesterday — the all-Ireland junior finals. I take this opportunity to congratulate Coleraine Eoghan Rua on their tremendous victory over Ballinderry — not that I have anything against Ballinderry.

Mr Elliott: I congratulate Sunderland on holding Manchester United to a draw on Saturday.

The issue is very serious, and, thankfully, I do not have an interest to declare. However, I know some people who have been affected, and it is a very serious matter.

I listened to Mr Farry, and, from his comments, I think that he was indicating that Turkey should perhaps be brought into the EU. I was not entirely sure at the start of his comments, but I think

that that view emerged. Given that Turkey is one of the offending countries involved in property fraud, perhaps that is an issue that needs to be looked at.

Given that the EU is so scrupulous in managing some of its initiatives and directives, I often wonder why it cannot bring in some arrangement to stop this practice. I recall holidaying in Spain a number of years ago and going to a hard-sell event, which Jimmy Spratt and other Members said also happen locally. The people at those events are experts in what they do, which is targeting people both in Spain and locally to whom they believe they can sell a property, or a supposed property, and then get money from. Clearly, there needs to be some European Union directive to stop that practice. I cannot believe that property fraud has been able to go on for so long without a directive's being introduced, because, as has already been said, Jim Nicholson and other MEPs have raised the issue in the Parliament and in committee. It is an area in which we need action.

2.00 pm

The agricultural and business communities sometimes become fed up with the amount of bureaucracy that emanates from Europe and has to be implemented by the Assembly and Executive. We fail to understand why the EU cannot put something in place to stop this practice.

We need to find a resolution for those affected. However, we also need to raise awareness throughout the entire community. Property fraud is an ongoing issue that occurs every day of the week, whether in Northern Ireland or other European countries. I am told that Spain is one of the greatest offenders, but there are others. People need to be fully aware of how the hard sell takes place, what happens, and how they are invited to events to see luxurious premises that they are told they can maybe purchase. People's hard earned money should not be forfeited in that manner. The Assembly needs to do all in its power to stop that happening, or to force the European Union to stop it happening. If that needs laws and directives from Europe, we need to encourage that and support those who bring them forward.

Mrs M Bradley: It is very annoying that there is not even a Minister in the Chamber. There are four Ministers in OFMDFM. Here we are, talking

about raising awareness, and not one of them would come along to listen to the debate.

Mr Weir: Will the Deputy Speaker clarify that this matter was not allocated to a Department? It is not a question of a Minister not wanting to come along. The fact is that the Business Committee decided that this matter did not fall to a particular Department, and that is why there is no ministerial reply.

Mr Deputy Speaker: There was a brief discussion on that matter this morning, and it is a matter for the Executive whether any Minister responds or not.

Mr Elliott: Thank you very much, Mr Deputy Speaker. The victims, I understand, are generally left with three options: to do nothing and lose their money; to comply with the terms of the developers, which may still mean that they will get nothing out of it; or to try for legal recourse.

It would have been interesting to hear something from a Minister, and I am not specifying which Minister. However, it may have been useful to hear what legal recourse exists in some countries, or, because the practice is going on in Northern Ireland, as Mr Spratt indicated, whether there is any legal recourse here against those who carry out the hard sell on victims.

Mr Spratt: The issues that I raised about fraud and the like obviously fall within the Department of Justice. It is a matter for a series of Departments. However, does the Member agree that the previous intervention was just a continuation of the SDLP's weekend comments by the member of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister Mrs Kelly?

Mr Elliott: Far be it from me to get into that political debate across the Chamber. I will let the Members finish that themselves. In broad terms, however, I accept that there are issues for the Department of Justice, just as I am sure that there are issues for other Departments, including OFMDFM. However, I want the Assembly to look for a mechanism to stop the practice happening in Northern Ireland. Maybe we could ask OFMDFM, hopefully as a result of this debate, to raise the matter with other Departments, and, through its departmental officials, to find a way to stop the practice.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Draw your remarks to a close, please. Time is up.

Mr Elliott: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr McClarty: I am delighted that the Ulster Unionist Party was able to secure the debate to voice the plight of hundreds of our citizens across the Province who have experienced such financial difficulty in recent years. That financial difficulty has often had a detrimental impact on family life, physical and mental health, and, for the self-employed, on their very livelihoods.

As has been said in the debate, some people have lost their entire pension savings. This is a very difficult economic time in Northern Ireland, and many are struggling with daily living expenses.

As my colleague Danny Kennedy said at the outset, some companies appear to be targeting novice investors — those who have little experience of overseas investment. Many now face crippling debt with no equity to fall back on.

First and foremost, warnings must be put out there for those who are thinking of investing. The last thing that the economically embattled people of Northern Ireland need is to see their hard-earned money either disappear into the pockets of fraudsters or be demolished by Spanish bulldozers. The prevalence of fraud in the property market abroad is a matter of grave concern, and one that the First Minister and the deputy First Minister must play their part in addressing.

We had eight contributors to the debate. The first contributor was Danny Kennedy, who stated that personal debt had risen. He said that there were complex zoning laws in some European states, which have led to the seizing of properties. He said that those properties have been purchased in countries such as Turkey and that no title deeds have been received. He wants to ensure that EU citizens who wish to purchase abroad can do so with confidence.

Peter Weir stated that the people who make such investments are not the greedy or the gullible. He said that it was important that all MEPs work together to resolve cases of fraud. He added that citizens from all constituencies and all backgrounds have been affected.

Raymond McCartney said that, most importantly, the EU must have a role in the regulation of property companies so that proper sanctions can be put in place, while Dolores Kelly said that indigenous populations are also suffering

from fraudsters' actions. She believes that Parliament is not taking the issue seriously and is not doing enough for those who have been affected.

Dr Stephen Farry said that parties are either Euro-sceptic, or even Euro-hostile, and that the motion underlines the importance of the European Union. He said that if we are serious about tackling property fraud that happens in Turkey, perhaps we should bring Turkey into the EU to resolve the issue. I wish that it were as simple as that.

Like other Members, Jimmy Spratt has constituents who invested their hard-earned money in foreign properties. He was critical of the European Union for not enforcing some of its directives. He referred to one particular case that involved 171 charges and £4 million of so-called investments. He cautioned local investors to check out individuals and companies before investing their money.

Barry McElduff said that, like the other MEPs, the Sinn Féin MEP, Bairbre de Brún, is working on the issue with her colleagues. He said that we need to work collectively to address the issue and that there is a need for a greater monitoring of foreign property roadshows.

Tom Elliott recalled holidaying in Spain, where he went to a hard-sell event. He said that there needs to be a directive from the European Union about that practice. Tom did not tell us whether the hard sell worked on him, but I presume that it did not. He said that, as a legislative Assembly, we need to do all in our power to help those affected and to prevent the practice.

I am somewhat disappointed, to say the least, that neither the First Minister, the deputy First Minister nor, for that matter, their junior Ministers, have turned up to address the concerns of the victims, many of whom simply wish to raise awareness of their experience so that it cannot happen to anyone else. Notably, however, all victims need our help to lobby the European Commission on their behalf. We must commit to working with Northern Ireland's MEPs to provide better protection for buyers and to impress upon the European Commission the need for better regulation.

In bringing the motion to the Assembly, the Ulster Unionist Party is committed to enabling local buyers to invest abroad with confidence, while seeking to ensure that the Assembly plays

its role in giving Northern Ireland the strongest possible voice in Europe.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly notes with concern the number of people from Northern Ireland who have been victims of property fraud in the European Union and Turkey; calls on the First Minister and deputy First Minister, working with Northern Ireland's MEPs, to make representations to the European Commission to take more definitive action to protect property buyers, to raise awareness of the problems associated with property fraud and to urge the countries concerned to better regulate property companies working within their jurisdictions.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The next item of business on the Order Paper is Question Time. I therefore propose, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until 2.30 pm.

The sitting was suspended at 2.11 pm.

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

2.30pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Finance and Personnel

Budget 2011-15

1. **Mr McCarthy** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on preparations for Budget 2011-15. (AQO 179/11)

Mr McCarthy: Can I pose question 1 to the Minister of Finance and Personnel?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr S Wilson): Can I answer the question that has been posed by the Member?

The preparations for the 2010 Budget are operating at two levels. First, there is the contact that I and my officials are having regularly with the Treasury to try to ascertain the most up-to-date picture of where the Budget proposals and decisions are going with the main Departments in GB. As the Member will know, eventually, that will affect the amount of money that comes to Northern Ireland. My last meeting with the Chief Secretary to the Treasury was on 15 September, and that meeting was also attended by the Finance Ministers from Wales and Scotland.

Secondly, in Northern Ireland, internal preparations took place over the summer. I had bilateral meetings with all the Ministers to talk about their own budget process, and, only last week, I presented a preliminary paper to the Executive for discussion. The Budget review group is also going on, at which I am always present and to which the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) is presenting papers.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Mr McCarthy, you may now pose a supplementary question.

Mr McCarthy: I could pose half a dozen supplementary questions, Mr Deputy Speaker, but I know that you would not allow me to.

I thank the Minister for his response. Will he agree that it would be smarter and, indeed, fairer for the Budget preparations to be carried out as early as possible? Will he provide a

guarantee that there will be a proper period of consultation on the draft Budget?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: It would be fairer for the Budget discussions to take place as quickly as possible. In fact, it is a necessity that the Budget debate and the final draft Budget be settled as quickly as possible for the very reason that the Member has given. First, there is a required consultation period, and, therefore, the later the draft Budget is made available to the Assembly and its Committees, the later the consultation will start and the later the end date for the final decision will be. I am sure that the Member knows from conversations with education and library boards, health boards, voluntary groups and businessmen that people are looking for some certainty. They know that pain is coming down the line, but they want to see some of the detail of how that will affect them, and we can only provide that once the final Budget is available. For that reason, he is absolutely right; we need to move as quickly as possible.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Given the concerns about welfare reform, which we heard about this morning, and the possibility that many more families will be plunged into poverty, what measures are being taken to mitigate the significant increase in poverty levels as a result of the Budget? Will Budget allocations and reallocations to services that are vital to keeping thousands of local people above the poverty line be prioritised in the process?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: If the Member is looking for some advice from me on what might be done to mitigate the impact of welfare reform, which will be decided not in this House but in Westminster, and if his party are so concerned about that, I suggest that he use his influence on the five absentee Sinn Féin MPs to encourage them to go to express their opposition where it really counts, instead of going around the countryside telling people that they are concerned but not taking the action that they could. However, having made that point — *[Laughter.]* It was only a “by the way”.

In the Executive, we have discussed what we need to do to mitigate the impact — there will be an impact across the board — on those in society who are least well off, and the Executive are well aware of that. One reason why I suggested that a pot of money should

be set aside as part of the Budget review is that Ministers could come forward with ideas on how best to spend it. Indeed, Members and Committees may come to Ministers with ideas about what new policies or actions might deal with the consequences for particular communities or groups. We need to think strategically, we need to plan, and we need to make early decisions. In the face of so many cuts, we should not merely try to consolidate everything that we do at present and stop doing anything new. We can stop doing some of what we do at present, and we can divert some resources elsewhere. When it comes to the Budget, I hope that the Assembly will support the plan to put aside some resources so that we can deal with the consequences to which the Member referred.

Mr Storey: Given his Department's requirement to produce savings delivery plans by 26 August 2010, will the Minister shed some light on why the Department of Education has not yet allowed the Committee, despite its repeated requests, to see the savings delivery plan? In the Minister's bilateral discussions with the Minister of Education, did he get any sense that she has identified any priorities on which to spend her budget?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I am tempted to say that, in some bilateral discussions, I did not get a sense of anything at all. However, I will not go into the details of those meetings. Savings plans were to be submitted to DFP by the end of August 2010. To date, only four Departments have submitted those savings plans, others have refused to compile them, and I have had discussions with others on where those savings might be made. It is important for Ministers to engage with their Departments.

I am a bit concerned that the Education Minister appears to believe that it is not necessary to look at savings plans until the Budget review group has had its discussions, until the Executive have had their discussions and until we know the outcome of 20 October. That is not a good example of planning.

Budget 2010: Delivery of Public Services

2. **Mr Frew** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of the potential

consequences for the delivery of public services if the Assembly fails to agree a Budget by the end of this calendar year. (AQO 180/11)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: If an agreed Budget is not in place by early in the new year, there will be serious implications for public bodies in Northern Ireland. As I said in answer to an earlier question, if money were plentiful, we could, perhaps, afford to leave Budget decisions and information until the last minute. However, we face constrained budgets, and people must plan to reduce or do away with services, offer redundancies, and so forth. Therefore, it is important that they be given the earliest possible warning. I have had conversations at constituency and ministerial level with a wide range of people from the voluntary sector, the statutory sector, boards, trusts, businesses, etc. All said that it would be a catastrophe not to receive early warning, well before the start of the next financial year, of what will be in the Budget.

Mr Frew: Will the Minister give an assessment of the potential consequences for the private sector should the Assembly fail to agree a Budget this year?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I do not want to say that it will cause particular difficulties for the private sector; it will cause difficulties for every sector. About 30% of the private sector relies on contracts from the public sector. The private sector needs to know whether there will be an effect on its business as a result of Budget decisions. The sooner Departments know about their budgets for next year and are able to convey that to the private sector, the better.

I had a long conversation with people from the social sector last week. Many believe that they could fill the gap or, in some cases, deliver the services much more cost-effectively than the statutory sector could. I also know that Members have been lobbied by that sector, because some have written to me already about the matter. However, that change cannot be effected overnight; there must be some planning and an opportunity to look at where budgets need to be pruned and where the social sector may be able to fit in. Therefore, a whole range of people will be affected, and that is one reason why we need to come to a conclusion quickly.

Mr McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I am sure that the

Minister is aware that the private sector has shed 37,000 jobs since May 2008. Therefore, there has already been a dramatic impact on that sector. Returning to the original question, does the Minister agree that there is much greater potential for a collective approach if, rather than simply focusing on cuts, we talk about ways to develop a strategy to rebalance the economy? That strategy would argue for fiscal powers and would generally put together an agreed plan for economic growth.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I totally agree with the Member that there is a strategic debate to be had about the Budget. Although Sinn Féin Members have not been exclusive in this matter, many have said that, before making any decisions, we must wait until 20 October to see what allocations the Westminster Government make to the Assembly. However, many of the strategic decisions that the Member is talking about, such as the direction of travel that we want to take the economy in and the priorities that we should set, can be done without knowledge of what the specific spending proposals for Northern Ireland might be over the next four years. That is a debate that we, unfortunately, did not engage in fully, and it has left a bit of a void. Returning to the answer that I gave to the Member for Strangford earlier, if that debate starts after 20 October, we will find that there is a further delay in the whole Budget process.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. What is the Minister's thinking on striking the balance between long-term planning and allowing time for readjustment through annual Budgets?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: This Budget period will last for four years. The allocation will be made for the next four years, and that is why I said that a strategic overview needs to be taken of how we want to use resources during that time. That is also why that kind of debate can be divorced from one on the actual amounts that are available for allocation. Even if we do not know the exact amount of money that is coming from Westminster, we can still have a debate about long-term decisions.

As the Member pointed out, there will be a divide between the things that can be done in the short term and those that can be done in the long term. That is why the debate about strategy is so important. It may be that some

Ministers decide that there are things that they are doing at the minute that they no longer want to do. It may not be possible for them to do that immediately, without legislation being passed in the Assembly, but, nevertheless, that needs to be factored into the plans for the next four years. Similarly, there may be capital projects that span a long time, and although we need to make decisions about those now, they must also fit into the long-term strategy.

The Member is quite right to say that there are two dimensions to the matter. We must decide what we do immediately, but some of the things that we decide to do now may not have an impact until well into the CSR period. For that reason, adjustments for the first year may need to be made, but they may not necessarily carry on through.

Construction Industry

3. **Mr McDevitt** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline how he will assist the construction industry, given the expectation of a possible 30% reduction in capital expenditure.
(AQO 181/11)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The construction industry has very much felt the economic impact of the downturn. Indeed, Mr McLaughlin pointed out that thousands of jobs have been shed by that and other industries as a result of the downturn. However, I have to say that the impact on the construction industry has, perhaps, been alleviated by the work that the Assembly has done, and the decisions that it has made, to bring forward construction projects through the re-profiling of our capital spend. We have spent about £1.7 billion this year, which is probably the last year that we will do that. About 60% of that amount goes on the construction industry, and, as a result, public sector projects now account for about 54% of construction industry employment.

2.45 pm

To a certain extent, decisions made by the Assembly have filled the hole that was made by the dramatic reduction in the private sector, especially the housing sector. However, until the outcome of the spending review is known, we will not have the final position of our capital budget for the next four years. The one thing that we do know is that we will not spend £1.7 billion next year or the year after; there will be a

severe reduction. We have to look at what can be done to fill those gaps that can be filled but also manage the reduction in work and ensure that we do not leave a skills gap in future years.

Mr McDevitt: Will the Minister confirm to the House that it would be a mistake to place an overwhelming burden of cuts on the capital side? In light of his earlier answer, will he also confirm that he does not intend to cut capital expenditure to a higher rate than he cuts current expenditure in response to what may or may not happen on 20 October?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: As a result of the Barnett formula, we are not simply given a pot of money. The Treasury will already have divided the money into a pot for current spending and a pot for capital spending. Therefore, to a certain extent, the answer that the Member is looking for is outside the control of the Executive and the Assembly.

There is, of course, some possibility of movement from current spending to capital spending. The Executive will have to look at whether we should move some money over to capital spending to fill the huge gap, even given the constrained current spending. The capital spending gap could be more than 40% if the trends that we pick up from the Treasury are anything to go by.

Another question is whether we should look at the sale and privatisation of some of our assets to try to bring in revenue for capital projects. That will be a big question for many Members, one that will, perhaps, challenge their ideologies. It might be a difficult question for members of the SDLP and Sinn Féin.

We also have to look at whether we can get any greater borrowing ability through the reinvestment and reform initiative (RRI); we raised that issue with the Government. What about the commitment to capital spending for the next 10 years that was made at St Andrews, albeit by the previous Government? Will the Conservative Party honour that pledge? As members of the Ulster Unionist Party claim to have great influence through their electoral pact with the Conservative Party, I am sure that they will seek to ensure that that pledge is lived up to.

Ms J McCann: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Does the Minister agree that sustaining the strategic investment programme

is essential to securing the future of the construction industry?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The strategic investment programme was not there simply as a crutch for the construction industry. Nevertheless, it does, of course, present important opportunities for the construction industry. The whole point of the strategic investment programme was to improve the infrastructure in Northern Ireland so that the rebalancing that Mr McLaughlin talked about could be undertaken. If we have a better infrastructure — better roads, ports, telecommunications, schools, and so on — it will be easier for us to attract private investment into Northern Ireland and grow the private sector. That is the whole point. That is why it is so essential and why Mr McDevitt's question was so important. What are we prepared to do, and what ideologies are we prepared to set aside, to try our best to undertake the strategic investment programme that we have set down?

Mr Campbell: Does the Minister agree that a number of capital projects in parts of Northern Ireland, which are very dependent on the retail and tourism sectors, are ready to go? They need the imprimatur of various Ministers, such as the Minister for Social Development and the Minister of the Environment, and if that comes from those Departments to him, will very serious consideration be given to those projects to try to promote the local economy?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: In the discussions that I have had with Ministers, I have been asking them to give me a list of their priority capital projects. Some of them have been reluctant to do that. The Member has hit the nail on the head; that is exactly why we need that information. Of course, if a Minister makes a particular project a priority and justifies why it should be so, that bid will have more chance of succeeding.

Government: Revenue

4. **Mr Savage** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what steps he has taken to identify and encourage any revenue-generating capacity within Departments. (AQO 182/11)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: It is the responsibility of individual Ministers to bring forward proposals on raising additional finance, and the ongoing work of the Budget review

group on that matter is most welcome. We had discussions at Greenmount College on 5 July, and a number of work streams were initiated, one of which was to look at the potential for raising revenue in each Department. As regards revenue-raising in my Department, I will be bringing proposals to the Executive, and it will be up to the Executive to decide whether they find those acceptable.

Mr Savage: I thank the Minister for his answer. At what point will he bite the bullet and speed up the sale of government assets as part of the plan to offset the cuts?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The sale of government assets is one of the things that we have looked at in the work streams for the Executive. I love the way that Members sometimes attribute that sort of power to me. I wish that I had the powers that Members think I have. Some Members wish that I did not have those powers and will resist my ever getting them.

The money that could be obtained from assets is, to a certain extent, limited in the current financial circumstances because many of those assets are land banks, and banks are not lending developers money unless they have a specific use for the land in mind. However, there are other assets that have revenue streams attached. Those are the ones that are most likely to be acceptable and to find a ready market. It is, of course, up to Ministers to look at the assets in their Departments and bring forward proposals for them.

Dr Farry: It is my understanding that the UK Government are trying to close their fiscal gap with a 77:23 ratio between revenue and spending. Does the Minister have an opinion on what the ratio should be in Northern Ireland?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: To a certain extent, we are already subject to the ratio that the Member described, because some of the 23% of revenue that the UK Government wish to raise will be raised here in Northern Ireland. We are already paying some revenue consequences. However, I know the point that the Member is making: can we simply get away without looking at what potential revenue there might be from additional charges in Northern Ireland, or do we simply make up the whole deficit through spending cuts? He knows my view on that. It is the same view that I have expressed to him on a number of occasions: there must be a balance. I have stuck my

neck out, as I know he has, on a number of occasions by suggesting some things that might be done. There is a whole host of other ways in which revenue might be raised. It is part of the work of the Budget review group to tease out from Ministers the potential for revenue-raising in their Departments.

Corporation Tax

5. **Mr I McCrea** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what the potential costs are of reducing corporation tax in Northern Ireland to the level that prevails in the Republic of Ireland.
(AQO 183/11)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: A broad range of figures has been provided on the cost of reducing corporation tax and on the cost of giving us the ability to reduce corporation tax in Northern Ireland. Assuming that we bring it down to the same level as exists in the Irish Republic, which I suppose is what the Member is referring to, the estimates have been anything between £200 million and £500 million. The Northern Ireland economic review group suggested £200 million, Varney suggested £300 million, and my Department estimated it to be £500 million. Members will be aware that the coalition Government are preparing a paper, and we have said to them that we want a very clear picture of the likely costs. I have also asked that officials from my Department be part of those discussions.

Mr I McCrea: I thank the Minister for his answer. The Minister will be aware that many Ulster Conservatives and Unionists - New Force (UCUNF) candidates for the Westminster election canvassed the country promising that a Conservative and unionist Government would deliver on corporation tax. Can the Minister give the House any idea as to whether he feels that that will actually happen?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I do not want to cast any aspersions on the influence that the Ulster Unionist Party has on the Conservative Party, but the fact that the UUP could not even get the Conservatives to stand down in a constituency, resulting in a unionist seat being lost, indicates how much influence there has been.

Leaving that aside, since the Government got in with the promise of a package to help us to rebalance our economy, it is important that all

parties in the Assembly collectively engage with the Government and push them to ensure that that additional work is done. We know that we are going to have a painful Budget, but if we can at least have some help with the restructuring of the economy, that would be a step forward.

Mr A Maginness: I thank the Minister for his answer to the Member's question. I could be forgiven for thinking that perhaps it was not the previous election that Mr McCrea was referring to but the upcoming one, but that is by the by.

Does the Minister agree that the work towards devolving the power to vary corporation tax should begin immediately? At the very least, if the power is devolved to the Assembly, the Assembly can exercise that power in whichever way it wants to. There is a lot of work to be done, including going to the European Commission once Westminster devolves that power.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: It should be done immediately, because there is a twin-track approach here; namely, that we would have Budget cuts, which would impact on the public sector, and that we would have help from Westminster in rebalancing the economy. We were promised a paper in the autumn. I am not too sure when that will appear, but it will certainly not be shortly after the spending review. It is important that we engage with the Treasury, and, over the summer, along with the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, I met the Treasury Minister to discuss the way forward on the matter and to emphasise the need to have a Northern Ireland input into it.

We have to be quite clear: the cost of this may be too high for us. Therefore, we must have an alternative strategy. In conversations with the Treasury, we have been looking at other things that might be done. Let us not put all our eggs in the "reduce corporation tax" basket. I would like this paper to look at whether there are possibilities when it comes to corporation tax credits for research, development, investment, training and a whole range of other things. My officials will certainly be encouraging the Treasury to look at that.

Education

Middletown Centre for Autism

1. **Mr Moutray** asked the Minister of Education to outline the terms of reference for any review of the Middletown Centre for Autism currently being undertaken by her Department.

(AQO 194/11)

The Minister of Education (Ms Ruane): Níl baint ag mo Roinn le haon athbhreithniú ar Ionad Choillidh Chanannáin d'Uathachas faoi láthair agus níl sé ar intinn aici a leithéid d'athbhreithniú a dhéanamh san am atá le teacht.

My Department is not involved in any review of the Middletown Centre for Autism and has no plans for such a review. I will continue to work closely with An Tánaiste, an tAire Oideachais agus Scileanna i nDeisceart na hÉireann, Mary Coughlan, the Minister in the South of Ireland. I remain committed to the Middletown project and to achieving the goals that have been set for it.

3.00 pm

Mr Moutray: The Minister said that her Department is not undertaking a review. Why then did one of her departmental officials say that a review was taking place in the Department of Education in light of the financial crisis in the Irish Republic?

The Minister of Education: I do not know where the Member got the information that one of my officials said that, but I would welcome any details on that.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle agus seo í mo cheist ar an Aire. What is the Minister's assessment of the need for an autism Bill for Northern Ireland?

The Minister of Education: As the Member will be aware, the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety is discussing and leading on that issue. At this point, it would not be appropriate for me to comment. However, it is important that all Departments work together to provide the best health and education services for young people who are on the autistic spectrum.

Mr McCallister: Will the Minister explain why the capital expenditure for the Middletown centre has been cut from £2 million to £1.2 million? She knows my views on the centre, but will that cut have an impact?

The Minister of Education: My Department is working closely with the Department of Education and Skills in the South of Ireland, and I have ring-fenced funding in the North for the capital budget. I would like that project to continue, and I am working closely with my counterparts in the South.

Education and Skills Authority

2. **Mr Leonard** asked the Minister of Education how many staff within the education sector volunteered for redundancy to facilitate the establishment of the Education and Skills Authority. (AQO 195/11)

7. **Mr P Maskey** asked the Minister of Education whether she and Protestant transferors are content to proceed with the establishment of the Education and Skills Authority. (AQO 200/11)

The Minister of Education: Go raibh maith agat. A LeasCheann Comhairle, tabharfaidh mé freagra ar Cheist uimhir a dó agus ar cheist uimhir a seacht le chéile. Tá ceithre chéad agus a deich ball foirne i ndiaidh a chur in iúl go mbeadh said sásta éirí as a bpost.

I will answer questions 2 and 7 together. Some 410 staff responded to requests for expressions of interest in voluntary severance. New service delivery models are being developed for a range of services, and those are being discussed with the convergence programme management board and the chief executives of the education and library boards. When those models have been fully developed and agreed, I hope that voluntary severance can be considered in line with convergence implementation and business needs.

For all the reasons that I outlined, I am content to proceed with the implementation of the review of public administration and with the establishment of the Education and Skills Authority. I have been ready to do so for the last year. Some political parties have attempted to block reform of the education system and to use the genuine concerns of the transferors to do that. To the best of my knowledge, all issues raised by the transferors have been resolved to their satisfaction, and I hope that all concerned will seize the opportunity to move forward.

Mr Leonard: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I am sure that the Minister and her staff are aware that the uncertainty and lack of movement are causing considerable stress among members of staff. How can that be dealt with?

The Minister of Education: Bhuel, aithnínm go bhfuil na baill foirne buartha faoina gcuid post agus aithnínm go bhfuil siad faoi strus dá bharr.

I recognise that staff have valid concerns about their position and that those may cause stress, but the process was never intended to be so protracted. Had the Education and Skills Authority been implemented in January as planned, staff could have been released as expected. However, we are now in a situation that is less than ideal. It has required much new thinking and planning, which cannot be rushed through without considering the complexities of delivering regional services during the lifetime of the existing organisations. Organisations cannot release staff until new service delivery models have been fully developed and agreed.

The progress that has been made to date reflects the scale of the challenge and the importance of agreement from all organisations involved. Staff have valid questions to ask of parties that attempt to block the reform of public administration.

Mr P Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. It is interesting to hear that. I have spoken to people who have expressed concern about the blocking of reform in the education system.

My question relates to the Protestant transferors. Are they content with the proposed establishment of the ESA? By and large, if the block on reform is removed, the ESA will save £20 million per year.

The Minister of Education: The Member is absolutely right: it will save £20 million per year. Obviously, we have to invest to save. I have secured the necessary funding to do so. The ESA will also ensure that we can target on the basis of need and that money is not squandered unnecessarily on bureaucracy and administration. Often, I hear parties opposite say that money is wasted on administration and that there are too many quangos. However, when there is an opportunity to do something, they talk the talk, but they cannot walk the walk.

As regards whether the transferors are satisfied, ar feadh m'eolais, tá na hAistreoirí sásta leis na réitigh a bhí ar na ceisteanna ar fad a d'ardaigh siad. To the best of my knowledge, all issues that have been raised by the transferors have been resolved to their satisfaction. Therefore, it

will be interesting to see what the next excuse will be from the parties opposite.

Mr Storey: For a Minister to come to the House and say, "to the best of my knowledge" is a clear indication that she is not across her brief.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question, please.

Mr Storey: If the issue relates only to the transferors, how does the Minister respond to the criticism that appeared in a recent newspaper article in August 2010 from the chief executive of Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS), who now says clearly on behalf of that sector that there are still outstanding issues that have to be addressed? He is clear that the issue does not just relate to the transferors. He wants equality. How does she answer that?

The Minister of Education: First, I am well across my brief on the establishment of the Education and Skills Authority. I have chaired —

Mr Storey: *[Interruption.]*

The Minister of Education: If the Member would not be rude and interrupt me, I would answer his question. He had his chance to ask his question.

I chaired a high-level group. Representatives from the Catholic trustees were at practically every meeting. The trustees support the establishment of the Education and Skills Authority. Maybe the Member would be better to use his energy and that of this party to support the establishment of the Education and Skills Authority. That, in turn, means supporting the movement of staff from education and library boards and, indeed, other organisations to the Education and Skills Authority, which would save money that is currently being wasted on unnecessary bureaucracy and administration and would get rid of 11 quangos, when one Education and Skills Authority is enough. Maybe it is time for the Member to show a bit of leadership.

Mrs M Bradley: What difficulties do education and library boards face due to the migration of staff to the ESA?

The Minister of Education: In answer to an earlier question or at an earlier point in this question, I stated the number of staff who wanted redundancy. I also answered a question about the need to ensure that there is one organisation rather than 11 organisations. As

I said, at every single level, staff in all those organisations want the ESA to be established. They understand that it is the best way to administer education and to use funding from the education budget. They also understand that the delay in the ESA's establishment is stressful. It should have been in place in January 2010.

DE: Budget

3. **Mr Kinahan** asked the Minister of Education for an assessment of her Department's budgetary position. (AQO 196/11)

The Minister of Education: I mbliana, tá buiséid sóchmhainní agus chaipitil na Roinne leithdháilte go hiomlán, agus tá mé ag súil leis go gcaithfear an t-airgead ar fad sa bhliain airgeadais seo. Go háirithe, tá buiséad caipitil faoi bhrú go foil agus thiapeáin mé go seasta do chomhghleacaithe ar an gCoiste Feidhmiúcháin le linn na mbabhtai deireanacha monatóireachta go raibh géarghá le hinfheistíocht bhreise in eastát na scoileanna.

The Department's resource and capital budgets for the current year are fully committed, and I anticipate full expenditure in this financial year. The capital budget, in particular, remains under pressure, and, in recent monitoring rounds, I have consistently highlighted to Executive colleagues the urgent need for further investment in the schools estate. I am disappointed that I did not receive the capital funds from the Minister of Finance that I bid for in the September monitoring round.

I am not in a position to provide an assessment for the future. That will be possible only when the Executive agree a draft Budget in line with the Programme for Government. At that stage, I will be able to begin work to assess the outcome and the implications for education services over the next four years. I am clear that we as an Executive and as an Assembly, the North/South Ministerial Council and the British-Irish Council need to ensure that we protect front line services and the most vulnerable and disadvantaged in our society. We must also ensure that we use the funding that we have. We must fight for the maximum funding and use it to ensure that we build a more equal Ireland and a fairer society here in this part of Ireland.

Mr Kinahan: I thank the Minister for her answer. In asking my supplementary question, I will

touch on question 6. I have visited a large number of the schools in south Antrim, and many of them are gasping for a little bit of funding to paint or repair the inside and outside of their school. Can the Minister find anything in her budget that would give all schools a little bit of funding to allow them to do up the interior and exterior of the school and, perhaps, work with the parents and teachers to pull everything together?

The Minister of Education: The Member makes some very valid points. Recently, I met representatives from a school in his constituency. He was part of that meeting, and I thank him for placing the focus on the underinvestment in the schools estate because I agree. We have 1,233 schools, our asset value is £4.5 billion, and we have insufficient funds to ensure that we can maintain the integrity of the estate. That does not mean that we are not using the money that we get wisely; we are. Since May 2007, we have completed 48 major school projects on my watch. That represents £404 million investment in the schools estate. We have a further 15 schools on site, which represents another £250 million. There are two other major capital projects that will, hopefully, come on stream and the 14 extra projects that I announced during the summer. That represents an investment of another £65 million in our schools estate. Some £8.5 million of the £13 million is for work on new schools. The rest of the money is for minor repairs because, as the Member knows, there has not been enough money put into the minor works projects.

We have spent the money that has been given to us. We have spent unprecedented amounts of money. In the two years before I came into post, direct rule Ministers handed back £64 million and £92 million. I am not handing back any money; I am spending every penny that has been given to me. No money is being handed back. I urge all parties to support me when I make bids in monitoring rounds for capital budgets. I reiterate how disappointed I am that I did not get capital funding in the September monitoring round. I look forward to the support of the Member's party when I look for further resources.

Mr A Maginness: The Minister talks about protecting front line services. Will she detail what steps she will take to do so? Rather than a rhetorical flourish, perhaps she will give us the details.

The Minister of Education: Anyone who looks at what we have done during my term of office will see exactly how I have protected front line services. I have increased funding to primary schools, during very difficult economic times; I am working closely with some of our most disadvantaged and vulnerable communities; I have initiated a programme with Women's Aid for our primary schools; and we have invested in a school sports programme because we want to deal with obesity at a young age and introduce young people to sport. We have increased the money that goes to equality. We have looked at the barriers to learning facing our Traveller, Roma and ethnic minority children. We have tried to redress the historical underfunding of the Irish-medium sector, and the list goes on. *[Interruption.]* I have equality impacted every budget that I have set. We have also set aside extra funding for the primary curriculum and the new curriculum that was brought in on my watch. We have a policy on early years. *[Interruption.]* We have a policy on literacy and numeracy, and no one can say that, on my watch, we did not target on the basis of need and protect front line services.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Members that all remarks will be made through the Chair. The Speaker told you that a few weeks ago, and that is the way it will be.

3.15 pm

Mr Givan: If the Minister is genuine about protecting front line services and tackling the Tory cuts, will her party not join our and the SDLP's Members of Parliament, take their seats at Westminster and protect front line services and the most vulnerable there?

The Minister of Education: That shows the extent to which the Member takes the education debate seriously. If the Member and his party are serious about protecting front line services, they should join the rest of us in establishing ESA and stop colluding with the squandering of money on administration. We need the money in the classroom and on the front line. You cannot have it both ways.

Ms Lo: In a recent report, Oxford Economics stated that cuts of up to 25% may affect the education budget, and economies to help schools to cope with those cuts could be made by asking them to share resources and by the creation of integrated schools. Does the Minister agree with that assessment?

The Minister of Education: Obviously, I agree that it is very important that schools share resources. That is why we have made it a statutory duty in relation to the entitlement framework. Gone are the days when there can be four classes in one town with four or five students in one class being taught the same subject at A level over a period of two years. I am encouraging collaboration and putting money into very innovative projects like the Lisanelly shared campus, where schools from all sectors are coming together so that we can ensure that all our young people are learning in a way that is appropriate and represents the best use of resources. We have different school sectors, and it is important that all those sectors work together.

Springhill Primary School and Glenwood Primary School

4. **Mr Humphrey** asked the Minister of Education if she has any plans to invest in the infrastructure of Springhill Primary School and Glenwood Primary School in Belfast. (AQO 197/11)

The Minister of Education: Is féidir liom a dhearbhu go bhfuil mé ag iarraidh infheistiú i scoileanna i dtuaisceart Bhéal Feirste, i gceantar na Seanchille agus i gceantair eile a bhfuil ardleibhéil díothachta sóisialta acu.

I assure the Member that I want to invest in schools in the north Belfast and Shankill areas and other areas with high levels of social deprivation. I have met principals of schools in those areas. I have visited them in their schools, and they have also been with me here in Stormont. I appreciate their concerns. I understand perfectly the need to get investment into those areas, and the inclusion of the rebuilding at Taughmonagh Primary School in my recent announcement — indeed, I chose Taughmonagh to make the announcement — supports that intent.

My officials have been working with the Belfast Education and Library Board to resolve any outstanding issues on the proposed major capital schemes for Springhill Primary School and Glenwood Primary School, particularly in relation to area planning matters. I ask my Executive colleagues for their support in securing additional funds to address the historical underinvestment in the schools estate. As I said, I am disappointed that I did

not receive the capital funds that I bid for in the September monitoring round.

Mr Humphrey: I am deeply disappointed by the Minister's response. I have listened to the Minister over the past number of years talking about the children in the Shankill area and referring to low educational attainment rates and their schooling generally. Members will understand the disappointment in two schools when an e-mail arrives from the Department at 11.32 am on 30 June, the last day of term, stating that their school is part of an overall review of provision in the area. Local governors, teachers, parents and the children themselves are hugely disappointed about that. I implore the Minister to make an early decision and to put the money where her mouth is.

The Minister of Education: First, it is good to hear the DUP focus on disadvantage. Hopefully, the next step for it will be to understand that breakaway testing in grammar schools disadvantages children from the Shankill. What I will pledge to do is to send the Member the statistics about children from the Shankill and other deprived working-class areas and the statistics about inequalities in the system.

Secondly, my recent review of capital projects listed in the investment delivery plan identified issues with a number of schemes, including those proposed for Springhill Primary School and Glenwood Primary School. The schemes cannot be progressed until those issues have been resolved. My officials are working closely with the Belfast Education and Library Board. The sooner we can get those issues resolved, the easier it will be to get funding to schools that deserve it.

We cannot continue with the failed policies of the past, where direct rule Ministers and education and library boards invested in schools that lay empty after a short time. Committees and the Assembly have rightly called education and library boards to account for the way in which they invested funding in the past. That will not happen on my watch. I want to get money into working-class areas and into areas of high social need. I have introduced major reforms in the education system to ensure that the children of the Shankill, the Falls, north Belfast and other areas throughout the North of Ireland get their due rights.

Mrs D Kelly: I listened interestedly to the Minister's final comments about getting

funding into areas of high social need and disadvantage. Given that north Lurgan is one such area and that the Minister told me some two years ago that work would begin on a new school for St Teresa's Primary School, what confidence can we have that the Minister's recent announcements about capital builds will become a reality?

The Minister of Education: My Department's record for the number of schools built speaks for itself. We have spent more money and built more schools in the past three years than were built during any other three-year period. Have all the schools been built? No. Would I like to build all the schools? Yes. It is, therefore, essential that schools and the areas in which they are located are looked at. It would be better if the Member focused on area-based planning, on the number of primary 1 children that there will be and on schools working together, because then we could quickly and effectively deliver the schools needed for every area, including Lurgan.

Mr K Robinson: I am interested to hear that the Minister will provide statistics on the children who are transferring out of primary schools in the Shankill area. Will the Minister extend that brief just a little and provide statistics on the number of children who have addresses in the Shankill area but attend grammar schools or, indeed, primary schools outside that area? I am talking about the Shankill in Belfast, not Shankill in Lurgan.

The Minister of Education: Ní raibh a fhios agam go raibh Seanchill i Lorgain ach sin rud nua a d'fhoghlaim mé inniu. I will certainly copy the Member into my response. Indeed, I will ensure that he is given those statistics for all working-class areas across the North, because we have them. The Department has done its research. We know about how working-class children are disadvantaged and about the low number of free school meal children in grammar schools. We also know that the secondary school sector is bearing the brunt of demographic decline and that it has by far the greatest number of children from working-class areas and children with special educational needs. Therefore, let us not pretend that we have a system that does not disadvantage working-class children. The schools that are doing breakaway tests are contributing to social bigotry.

Schools: Further and Higher Education Links

5. **Rev Dr Robert Coulter** asked the Minister of Education for her assessment of the level of co-operation between secondary schools and further and higher educational colleges.

(AQO 198/11)

The Minister of Education: Tá mé sásta go bhfuil comhoibriú an-mhaith idir iarbhunscoileanna agus Coláistí Breisoideachais i mórán cásanna, agus go n-imríonn Coláistí Breisoideachais ról an-tábhachtach in obair na bPobal Foghlama Ceantair trasna an tuaiscirt anois.

I am pleased that, in many cases, there is now very good co-operation between post-primary schools and further education colleges, with further education colleges now playing a valuable role in the work of area learning communities across the North. That is essential, because it is through working in partnership with other schools and further education providers that all post-primary schools can offer young people at Key Stage 4 and post-16 a much broader and better balanced range of qualifications to reflect their needs, aspirations and interests. It is also a means by which post-primary schools can share their own good practice.

Additionally, through joint planning to meet the needs of their students, schools can avoid the situation in which duplicate courses are offered to very small numbers of pupils, thereby ensuring better use of our money. As I said, in a tight financial climate, it cannot be tenable for schools in the same area to run separate classes. For example, I am aware of four schools in the same area learning community that are running separate year 13 classes in A-level art and design, with fewer than five students in each. That is dreadful; think of the amount of money that it costs to run those four courses and to pay for the teachers and support staff. We cannot afford to waste resources in that way, and we have to plan our provision better. Plus, it is better for the young people involved that there are more students in a class. It is not good for young people when a class reaches a certain level, because they do not get the best possible educational experience.

Rev Dr Robert Coulter: I thank the Minister for her response. Does she agree that our

further education system increasingly has to address the failures of an education system that she presides over? Will the Minister inform the House of any new initiatives that she and her Department have in place to redress and answer that problem?

The Minister of Education: I do not agree with the Member's comment. My predecessor, Martin McGuinness, and I have ensured, on coming into the post, that, at the earliest opportunity, we tackled the discriminatory 11-plus and how pathways for children were being blocked at the age of 11. Obviously, the previous education system had an impact on young people at the age of 11 and at the next transfer stage, which is post-GSCE.

I do agree with the Member that further education colleges were expected to pick up the pieces following the wholesale failure of the system for young people. Thankfully, we now have policies in place that are bringing about much needed change. For example, we have transfer 2010-11, the literacy and numeracy strategy, the entitlement framework and a revised curriculum for primary schools. We are targeting disadvantage and encouraging further education colleges to work with all our schools on post-16 education.

Mr Butler: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The Minister mentioned the entitlement framework. Will she give us an assessment of how successfully the entitlement framework has been delivered between further education colleges and post-primary schools?

The Minister of Education: It has been increasingly successful. The vast majority of post-primary schools are working with the further education colleges in their area learning communities, and I welcome that. However, we now need a step change and to go a stage further. We cannot, as I said, continue to have four or five classes teaching the same A level for a small number of young people. We need to use our money wisely to provide the best possible education for all our young people and to encourage all sectors to work together.

Mr Storey: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Will you and the Office of the Speaker check the accuracy of what the Minister of Education said in answer to a question, when she made reference to the fact that she had spent all her money? The Northern Ireland Audit Office — an office of integrity and importance

— has a contrary view. Will the Hansard record be checked to determine the accuracy of the information that was given in the House today by the Education Minister?

Mr Deputy Speaker: It is my understanding that the Speaker normally checks Hansard anyway.

3.30 pm

Question for Urgent Oral Answer

Prisoner Release: Devidas Paliutis

Mr Deputy Speaker: I have received notice of a question for urgent oral answer under Standing Order 20A from Mr Tom Elliott to the Minister of Justice.

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Justice to provide an explanation of the circumstances surrounding the erroneous release of prisoner Devidas Paliutis from Maghaberry prison.

The Minister of Justice (Mr Ford): As I notified the Chairperson of the Committee for Justice in writing on 1 October, I regret to advise the House that Mr Devidas Paliutis was released erroneously from Maghaberry prison on the afternoon of Wednesday 29 September.

I have initiated an urgent inquiry. It is to report to myself and the director general of the Prison Service by the end of October, but I have also made it clear that I wish to have interim recommendations based on emerging findings sooner than that. In addition, I was today assured by the director general of the Prison Service that measures are in place to strengthen procedures at all prisons. Those include a strengthening of staff capability in this area and improved communications from the video link facilities to the office that authorises discharge. Further, I am grateful to Dr Michael Maguire, the chief inspector of Criminal Justice Inspection, who has agreed to review the findings of the inquiry. I will be discussing this matter, among other things, with him later this afternoon. As there will be a detailed inquiry, I do not think that it would be right to go into detail at this stage about what may have happened. I do, however, understand fully the concerns about this matter, so I will summarise my understanding of what happened.

Devidas Paliutis was committed to custody in January this year, charged in connection with a number of offences, including ones of a sexual nature. In the course of the prosecution process, Paliutis appeared by video link from Maghaberry prison before Newry Magistrate's Court on 29 September. He was returned for trial by the district judge to the Crown Court. The holding charges against Mr Paliutis were withdrawn from the Magistrate's Court, with other charges substituted in their place. That information was conveyed electronically to the Northern Ireland Prison Service correctly and in line with current procedures. As I understand it, the information that initially came to the Prison Service was that the charges had been withdrawn. Action was taken on that basis. Again, in line with normal procedures, prior to the discharge of a prisoner in those circumstances, the papers were checked by a senior member of the prison. Clearly, we are not in possession of all the detailed facts at this stage, but we are examining any procedural weaknesses, as well as human error.

Management at Maghaberry was alerted to the issue on the afternoon of 30 September, when the prisoner was unavailable for his scheduled consultation with his solicitor. The police were immediately notified, and the director general spoke to me. I know that there was effective liaison between the Prison Service and the PSNI. I myself spoke to senior police officers on Thursday evening and again today. I am very grateful to the PSNI for its efforts to locate and return Mr Paliutis to custody. I know that there was close liaison with the Garda Síochána and Interpol. Addresses in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland were visited within 24 hours. I also assure the House that the director general and I took immediate steps to ensure that the interests of the alleged victim were fully safeguarded through the PSNI.

I also regret to inform the House of a separate incident on Friday, when another prisoner was released erroneously from Downpatrick Crown Court. The prisoner, Connelly James Cummins, had been produced in court because of an alleged breach of a custody probation order. That matter was dismissed by the court. It is my understanding, however, that Mr Cummins's file was marked "hold" on the basis that he is still awaiting trial on other charges, namely theft, aggravated vehicle taking and using a vehicle without insurance. It appears that a prison

custody officer failed to take those charges into account and released Mr Cummins in error.

Again, I assure the House that appropriate steps were taken to respond to the incident as soon as the error was discovered, which was within minutes of the prisoner being set free. The PSNI was informed and has issued a force-wide alert with regard to Mr Cummins, who is still unlawfully at large.

Although the circumstances that led to that incident are different from those in the case of Mr Paliutis, it is vital that lessons are learned to identify where there are procedural weaknesses so that the margin for human error can be removed. That is why I have asked that that incident be included in the scope of the inquiry into the erroneous release of Devidas Paliutis. I have also called a meeting this evening, at which I expect to receive assurances that steps have been taken to ensure that Friday's error will not be allowed to happen again.

I conclude by assuring the House that I take such issues extremely seriously. I will be following the progress of the inquiry closely and will ensure that the House is advised of the lessons learned and of changes made to prevent any future occurrence.

Mr Elliott: Since I tabled my initial question, we are in a much more serious situation, having now heard that a second prisoner has been mistakenly released. Does the Minister accept that in other places senior civil servants and Ministers have had to resign for much less? What immediate action is the Minister going to take to ensure that this does not happen again and to take action against those who made the mistakes?

The Minister of Justice: Mr Elliott has a point: we are clearly in a serious situation. However, I disagree that we are in a "much more serious situation". The second escapee's offences concerned car theft, which is nothing like as serious as the concerns that we all have about someone who is charged with serious sexual offences.

Mr Elliott suggested that senior civil servants or Ministers might resign for less in other places. That will have to await the outcome of the inquiry that we have instituted. There is no point in me making announcements on whether or not heads should roll when I have called for a full inquiry that will be externally verified by the chief

inspector of criminal justice. I am prepared to await the outcome of that before I decide on the appropriate actions to take against individuals, if any.

I outlined that steps were being taken, including a strengthening of staffing procedures and a re-examining of processes to ensure that the events do not recur in the immediate future. As I said, I will be having a further meeting later today to follow that up.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Justice (Lord Morrow): I have listened carefully to what the Minister has said. Will he confirm whether his initial understanding that the release was due to human error was correct? If so, did the error occur within the Prison Service or the Courts and Tribunals Service? Will he assure the Assembly that all possible steps are being taken to ensure that this does not happen again?

Furthermore, does the second incident not clearly demonstrate that a lax regime exists? Will the Minister accept that, if the confidence of the general public is to be restored, he must instigate a review of the two cases as a matter of urgency? Will he undertake to return to the House with a full report at the earliest possible date?

The Minister of Justice: As I said, it appears that there may well be a strong element of human error. However, we are also looking to see whether there is any issue with procedural systems, weaknesses in the system or any failure in the technology. Again, at this stage, it is not possible to give a definitive answer, save to say that we are following up all possible lines of inquiry. If there is an error, it would appear to lie more within the Prison Service, but whether the fault lies with technology systems or individuals in the Prison Service, I am not in a position to state.

It is entirely understandable that Mr Elliott and Lord Morrow should question whether the situation is an indication of a lax regime. However, in the context of the past five or six years, 50,000 or 60,000 cases of prisoners on remand have been considered, whether by video link or in person in Magistrate's Courts before district judges, and we are talking about two problems, which, admittedly, both occurred in one week. I am not sure that that necessarily establishes that there is a lax system, but I am determined to ensure that we establish that there is not a lax system.

Nothing can ever be 100% perfect, but people have a right to expect that we do not see such errors recurring in the same way. So, there will be a firm and thoroughgoing review into what happened in both cases. As I said, I will report back to the House. I suspect that the Justice Committee may wish to see me to go into detail on the situation. It will be important that the lessons are not only learned but seen by the Assembly, representing the people, to have been thoroughly learned.

Mr McDevitt: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. The last time the Minister of Justice came to the House to address a question for urgent oral answer, the Office of the Speaker gave discretion to every party to ask a question. On this occasion, that has not happened. Can you clarify for the House why, on this occasion, we have not had the opportunity to ask questions on a party basis?

Mr Deputy Speaker: The normal protocol is to take questions from the Member who tabled the question and the Chairperson of the relevant Committee.

Before we adjourn, I am sure that the Assembly will want to congratulate Europe on winning the Ryder Cup and — wait for it — Graeme McDowell on his winning putt.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

Adjourned at 3.41 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 5 October 2010

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Matters of the Day

Culmore Road Bomb

Mr Speaker: Mr Pat Ramsey has sought leave to make a statement on the bomb at Culmore Road, which fulfils the criteria set out in Standing Order 24. I shall call Mr Pat Ramsey 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 each have up to three minutes in which to speak on the matter. The convention is that there will be no opportunity for interventions, questions or a vote on the matter. I will not take any points of order until the item of business is concluded. If that is clear, we will proceed.

Mr P Ramsey: Thank you for agreeing to the business being heard in the House this morning.

There has been much comment about the timing of last night's cowardly bomb attack on the Culmore Road in the city of Derry. Thankfully, no one was hurt, but it brought misery, heartache and distress to many thousands of people in the city. Some will see it as a response to President Clinton's visit to Derry last week, and others will remark that it may be something to do with the Tory conference currently under way in Birmingham, but perhaps the most apt for the people of the city will be today's date: 5 October. That was the day, in 1968, when thousands of people in Derry gathered on the streets to protest about civil rights.

Just as the people united then to speak out against injustice, we stand united today, as political parties in Derry and in this House, to condemn the born-again Provos responsible for this outrageous attack. Their actions have caused great inconvenience and distress to the wider community in Derry. That includes vulnerable elderly people, some of whom were

sleeping, who had to be evacuated from their homes late last night. Hard-pressed businesses have had their properties damaged, innocent children are unable to get to school and hundreds of workers and commuters have not been able to get to work.

As, I am sure, you know from listening to people, Mr Speaker, there is a great sense of anger today, which will be shared by many of my colleagues in the House. More importantly, there is a strong determination that those who are responsible will not be allowed to set back the growth and development of our wonderful city. Nor will they curb the plans and desire for a better future for everyone in the historic city of Derry.

I pay tribute to the staff of Da Vinci's hotel for their vigilance and swift action in reporting the bomb and evacuating people out of the hotel. I also acknowledge the tremendous work of the PSNI in protecting people's lives and putting at risk their own lives. Even now, there is a suspicion of another vehicle in the wider area.

Finally, I evoke the civil rights anthem of 5 October 1968. The message in the city then was "We Shall Overcome". The message today is that those who are responsible will not succeed, and the people of Derry will overcome.

Mr Campbell: Speaking on behalf of the Democratic Unionist Party, I join Mr Ramsey and, hopefully, Members from right across the House in supporting the widespread condemnation that has rightly been expressed regarding the latest attempt to disrupt life in Londonderry and across Northern Ireland.

It appears that the information — as much as is available — points the finger at dissident republican elements of one description or another. It is, of course, only two months since they attempted to bomb the Strand Road police station, which is less than a mile away from last night's attempted murder attack. There have

been other attacks in Newry and elsewhere. The message is very clear: the dissident republican elements intend to continue to carry out the type of attacks and atrocities that their predecessors carried out before them. Just as their predecessors failed, so must they fail.

We know that the condemnation is there, and it is good, right and proper that it should be. However, condemnation does not ensure that the propagandists and propagators of last night's violence end up in jail. The only way that we will stop attacks such as that is with convictions in a court of law. That is what is required. The local community is required to go to the police with information to bring about convictions in a court of law. We understand that those people have been called conflict junkies, traitors and Neanderthals. We know all of what they have been called, but we also know that they are still carrying out those attacks. The only way to stop them is convictions in a court of law. To prevent a recurrence, anyone who has any information, be they in this House or outside it, should give that to the police to ensure that those who are guilty of such attacks are brought before the courts.

Ms M Anderson: Go raibh míle maith agat. I stand here, as Sinn Féin's representative, to unreservedly condemn the planting of the bomb in Derry last night and to call on anyone with any information to assist the PSNI with its enquiries.

Some politicians, perhaps inadvertently, give a degree of credibility to the actions of those who were involved in the planting of the bomb in Derry by attempting to connect those groups with the terrible conflict that we have emerged from. Of course, those who planted the bomb take a degree of comfort from those misguided comments. Republicans have only ever involved themselves in armed action when there was no other means to pursue their political objectives. The Good Friday Agreement changed all of that. It is quite clear that the conditions that we endured in the past no longer exist. We lived in a state whose institutions were designed and sustained in the interest of one dominant ruling class. It is unfortunate but true that it was a Protestant Parliament for a Protestant people. It was an Orange state, it was 50 years of oppression, but all of that has now gone, as have the vast bulk of the 35,000 British troops who were on our streets — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Ms M Anderson: The actions of those involved in planting the bomb last night are designed to bring British troops back onto our streets and remilitarise the North. They are also designed to close the democratic space that is now open to republicans. Those people want to end the power-sharing arrangements; however, they will fail.

Such attacks on the people of Derry and on the people of Ireland only make us more determined to build on our present opportunities in the all-Ireland and power-sharing political institutions that were achieved through long and arduous negotiations. Some of those involved in such attacks might genuinely but absolutely mistakenly believe that they are furthering some kind of republican cause. However, they do not have popular support for their actions, and they have a responsibility to put the needs of the people first.

Mr F McCann: On a point of order.

Mr Speaker: Order. I said that there are no points of order during speeches on the very sensitive issue of a matter of the day. I am happy to take a point of order after the issue is dealt with.

Ms M Anderson: My final comment is to say that the vast majority of the people of Derry and of Ireland overwhelmingly support the peace process and the political way forward. I ask people, in this Chamber and beyond —

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Ms M Anderson: — to be very careful about comments that they make — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Ms M Anderson: — so that we try to resolve this situation in a way that will benefit all. *[Interruption.]*

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

Mr McClarty: Thank you, Mr Speaker. On behalf of the Ulster Unionist Party, I thank Ms Anderson for that very jaundiced and misplaced lesson on the history of this Province. There is no excuse for violence in this Province: there never has been any excuse, and there never will be.

Mr Speaker, what a difference a day makes. Yesterday, here in Northern Ireland, we were in a state of euphoria after the magnificent victory of the European team in the Ryder Cup. Much of that success, of course, was owed to two of our finest golfers, Graeme McDowell and Rory

McIlroy. Today, unfortunately, the headlines are about Neanderthals who have not yet woken up to the fact that Northern Ireland has moved on. Such individuals can never be allowed to succeed. Thankfully, no one was injured, but there is huge disruption in Londonderry this morning, and it is the community which has been inconvenienced.

The perpetrators of this senseless, pointless act must be apprehended and convicted. That can only happen if there is a flow of information from the community. Therefore, I appeal to those who have even the smallest snippet of information to pass that on to the PSNI. I pay tribute to members of the PSNI who put their own life at risk last night to protect others. If the perpetrators are listening, indeed, if they are even out of their bed at this time of the morning, I say to them, "You cannot succeed, you will not succeed".

Dr Farry: This was a disgraceful attack on the people of Derry. There has never been any justification for violence in this or any society, and that statement remains as true today as ever. What was most striking about the attack last night in Derry was the anti-economy message that lay behind it. In that respect, it is such a betrayal of the people of Derry and of Northern Ireland. When people are battling hard to protect jobs, to bring new jobs, to bring in new investment and wealth, to try to improve people's living standards, the dissidents' message is the absolute opposite. It is nihilistic. They have no interest in the well-being of society. Their emptiness and lack of a message stand exposed to the rest of the world.

It is important that the House remains united in standing up to dissidents; that we provide a positive alternative of a shared future that includes everyone; that we retain our focus on the economy and on trying to improve people's standard of living; and that we give our full support to the Police Service of Northern Ireland for the extremely difficult job that it does every day and night in trying to protect the people of Northern Ireland from such threats. It is incumbent on anyone who has information relating to the attack to bring it to the attention of the authorities. I am certain that the people who carried out the attack have extremely low levels of support. They are rejected by the overwhelming majority of the people in Derry and elsewhere, and it is important that we eliminate this cancer from society sooner rather than later.

10.45 am

Mr Speaker: I will now take Mr McCann's point of order.

Mr F McCann: On a point of order, Mr Speaker, there was order throughout the Chamber as Members made their submissions. However, every time my colleague got up, she was heckled continuously by Members on the other side of the House. When people get up to deliver such a submission, they should receive the order that Members from other parties are given.

Mr Speaker: At times, Members from all parties try to speak from a sedentary position. I think that the Member will realise that I did bring Members to order. Members need to appreciate that I have a difficult enough job up here trying to maintain order. As I said, from time to time, Members from all parties are to blame for trying to speak from a sedentary position, and I hope that the Member understands that.

Mr F McCann: On another point of order, Mr Speaker, it is my understanding that the Minister for Social Development was to appear in the House today to explain the actions that he will be taking to restore morale in the Housing Executive, especially in light of current inquiries. Is there any reason why he will not be appearing before us today?

Mr Speaker: There is nothing in the Order Paper to suggest that the Minister for Social Development will appear in the House today. Yesterday, there were rumours that he might come in today to make a ministerial statement. That has obviously not happened, and my understanding is that he will not appear in the House today to make a statement or on any other business.

Mr F McCann: I had tabled a question for urgent oral answer and was informed at the time that the Minister would appear before the House today to tell us about the actions that he will be taking to restore confidence in the Housing Executive.

Mr Speaker: I know that the Member submitted a question for urgent oral answer. However, I decided not to accept it because it did not meet the criteria in Standing Orders. Yes, there were rumours that the Minister would make a statement; however, that is obviously not the case now.

Assembly Business

Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development

Mr Speaker: I advise Members that I received Mr Tom Elliott's resignation as Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development, which took effect from 20 September 2010. The nominating officer of the Ulster Unionist Party, Mr Tom Elliott, notified me that he wishes to nominate Mr Roy Beggs to fill the vacancy. Mr Beggs accepted the appointment.

Executive Committee Business

Debt Relief Bill: Consideration Stage

Mr Speaker: I call the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, Mrs Arlene Foster, to move the Consideration Stage of the Debt Relief Bill.

Moved. — [The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mrs Foster).]

Mr Speaker: One amendment has been tabled. Members will have received a copy of the Marshalled List, which provides details of the amendment. The amendment allows for payments to cover intermediaries and authorities' costs. I remind Members who intend to speak that they should address their comments only to the amendment. The Questions on stand part will be taken at the appropriate points in the Bill. If that is clear, we shall proceed.

Clause 1 (Debt relief orders)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mrs Foster): I beg to move the following amendment: In page 16, line 29, insert

“(10) The Department may, out of the proceeds of fees charged under Article 361(1)(za), make payments to competent authorities or approved intermediaries in connection with the exercise of the functions of approved intermediaries under this Part.”

Before I speak to the amendment, I thank the members of the Enterprise, Trade and Investment Committee for their helpful scrutiny of the Bill. As the Committee's scrutiny was drawing to a close, officials brought it to my attention that it would be desirable if a minor amendment were to be made to the Bill. I agreed that the amendment would be beneficial, and I wrote to the Committee and my Executive colleagues to tell them about it. The amendment is to clause 1 and is to enable moneys raised through charging a fee to applicants to the debt relief scheme in respect of intermediaries' costs to be paid over either to the intermediaries or to their competent authorities.

The debt relief scheme is to enable the Official Receiver, who is an official in my Department and an officer of the court, to make what are termed “debt relief orders” on the application of eligible individuals. A debt relief order will be similar to a bankruptcy order made by the High

Court, but it will cost substantially less. It will afford protection against legal action in respect of debts covered by the order for a one-year period, at the end of which liability to pay those debts will be cancelled.

Applications to the debt relief scheme will be made through trained and experienced debt advisers acting as intermediaries. The intermediaries' function will be to assess whether debtors are eligible for the scheme and, if they are, to complete an online application form on their behalf. The intermediaries will then submit the completed form to the Official Receiver. Intermediaries will be appointed by the competent authorities designated by my Department, and those competent authorities will be organisations engaged in the provision of debt management or debt counselling services.

Paragraph 10 of the schedule to the Bill amends article 361 of the Insolvency (Northern Ireland) Order 1989 to enable those applying to the debt relief scheme to be charged a fee in respect of the intermediary's costs. The fee amount will be set in subordinate legislation. Amending the Bill to allow the moneys raised through charging that fee to be paid over to either the intermediaries or their competent authorities recognises the reality that the intermediaries work closely with the competent authorities and that expenditure associated with operating the debt relief scheme will fall on both the competent authorities and the intermediaries.

The amendment will mean that, in the case of training, fee income can be paid over to the competent authority to pay for the training of intermediaries, instead of being paid to the individual intermediaries and passed on by them to the competent authority. By providing for payment to the intermediaries and/or the competent authority, the amendment allows the payment regime to have the appropriate flexibility.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment

(Mr A Maginness): The Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment welcomes the Debt Relief Bill, which is intended to provide a remedy for those who can neither fund an individual voluntary arrangement nor afford the cost of petitioning for bankruptcy and are therefore unable to free themselves from a lifetime burdened by debt that they have no reasonable prospect of being able to pay.

I thank the Minister and her officials for co-operating so fully with the Committee in its consideration during Committee Stage. The Committee had concerns about the provision of clear guidance and timelines on investigations, provisions to cover unforeseen changes in an individual's circumstances and upper time limits on debt relief restriction orders. The Department responded to the Committee's concerns by clarifying details on those provisions and, in the case of provisions to cover unforeseen changes in an individual's circumstances, by obtaining detail on the impact of equivalent legislation in England and Wales.

The Committee sought clarification from the Department on plans that it may have to charge a fee, as provided for in the Bill, to organisations seeking to act as approved intermediaries. The Department responded that it currently has no plans to charge a fee in connection with the granting or maintenance of designation as a competent authority, and the Committee was content that the Department's responses addressed adequately its concerns on those issues.

Towards the end of Committee Stage, the Minister wrote to advise the Committee that she had decided to table an amendment to the Bill at Consideration Stage. That amendment would allow a fee to be charged to applicants for the costs of persons acting as approved intermediaries. She advised the Committee that the amendment was brought following advice from the Insolvency Service in England and Wales that said that, because most intermediaries are likely to be salaried employees, it is better to be in a position where the proceeds of that fee can be paid to the competent authorities as an alternative to being paid to the intermediaries themselves. The Committee considered the proposed amendment to be appropriate and was content to note it.

Mr Irwin: I am sure that Members will agree that the legislation is very timely, given that Northern Ireland is experiencing a difficult economic outlook. Times are tough, and the Bill is a recognition of the fact that, in tough economic times, although the vast majority of people are able to tighten their belts and budget their income to meet a variety of challenges, there are those who are financially very vulnerable and have got into a vicious circle of debt from which they cannot get out. The Bill

is a reaction to those specific circumstances, and it brings Northern Ireland into line with England and Wales, where similar schemes are operated. I welcome the fact that the Bill is a remedy to debt for those who need it most without the prohibitive costs associated with filing for bankruptcy. Those people include those who have little income after necessary living costs have been paid and who have no assets.

Although the heavy lifting of discussion and debate on the Bill was done prior to my membership of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment, I am conscious that a lot of thought and deliberation went into the process. That is fairly represented by the fact that only one amendment, on a technical aspect, has been tabled. That is a credit to the Minister and, of course, to the Committee.

The legislation should not be seen by anyone as a green light to accumulate debt and then walk away. The six-year re-entry rule is a clear marker that the Bill is a specific response to specific circumstances. It is designed to provide a lifeline to people who are in severe financial difficulties.

The amendment is a sensible approach to the obvious costs that will be associated with intermediaries getting to grips with the new legislation when it becomes active. I feel that it is a responsible amendment that will help to facilitate the training that is necessary to accurately provide advice on those who will be deemed eligible for a debt relief order.

Having looked at the Committee's report, I am keen to see greater emphasis placed on a system whereby, following a person's use of a debt relief order, an intermediary would be in a position to give more focused advice on that person's financial situation to stop them ending up in a similar position all over again. When a debt relief order is served, that should trigger a mechanism whereby advice services and intermediaries pay particular attention to that individual, who will need assistance in handling their financial affairs. In that mechanism, specific advice would be tailored to that individual to help avoid future debt building up.

I welcome the opportunity to contribute to the Consideration Stage. I support the Bill and the amendment.

Mr Cree: We have discussed the matter at some length in Committee and in the House.

The Ulster Unionist Party is fully behind the amendment and has no difficulty supporting the Bill.

Mr Neeson: As a member of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment, I support the amendment and the Bill. I thank the Minister and her officials for listening to the Committee's concerns. The process has shown the importance of scrutiny by the Assembly's Statutory Committees. It is very welcome to know that we are having an impact on legislation in the House.

Mr Frew: I commend Mr Neeson's words in what he said about the Committees. In my short time in the House, I have found that the Committees seem to be working very well.

I find it enjoyable and educational being on Committees. I am on the same Committee as the Member. I find real benefit in sitting on Committees and in the work that they do.

11.00 am

The amendment is common sense and is needed in the Bill. For anybody who finds themselves in this position, it is a traumatic time, and it is only right and proper that they have someone to speak to and to work through their problems with. However, the individuals and organisations that undertake that work also need support and training. Citizens advice bureaux (CAB) were mentioned. If people in this position do not go to their local politicians, they will certainly go to their local citizens advice bureaux. It is good and proper that these people will undertake that work on behalf of people in trouble.

It is also proper that the money be raised by charging the applicants a fee, because it would be unfair to place that charge and burden on the taxpayer. Given what applicants will go through and the support and guidance that they will receive, I do not think that it is too much to ask that they pay a small fee to obtain that service. Why should the taxpayer be burdened with that? It would be simply unfair. Given that the fee charged under the debt relief scheme in England and Wales is less than one third of the cost for a petition for bankruptcy debt relief, it represents a bargain for the person who finds themselves in that situation. The moneys will, of course, be used not only for time and labour but for training and the provision of computers to enable the people involved to do their work. It is, therefore, right that payments can be made

to the competent authorities. It would not be good, right or proper if intermediaries were paid and then had to pay, if you like, their masters. I believe that the amendment also covers that situation. The amendment is common sense, and it is good that we have it.

Mr Givan: The amendment is sensible. The Insolvency Service in England and Wales has suggested that this would be a better way for us to take forward the administration of the fee, because it has had to secure the agreement of intermediaries in order to pass that fee on to the competent authority. An unanticipated situation in which the moneys for an employee's work go to the employer as the competent authority rather than the employee may lead to a degree of tension and must be avoided. The amendment, therefore, makes sense.

The intermediaries carry out an important role. They will be designated as a professional in the field and will carry out the important task of assisting the applicant, who will often come to them in distress and in need of help because of the circumstances in which they find themselves. Now that the economy is suffering, more and more people are coming to our constituency offices and presenting their financial difficulties to us. As my colleague said earlier, we do not have the kind of professional skill required to advise them on debt management. We often refer them to the likes of the citizens advice bureaux, which play an excellent role. I know that four other organisations have expressed an interest in also carrying out that work.

Mr Craig: I declare an interest as a member of the management board of a citizens advice bureau. I concur with my colleague: it is remarkable that three years into a serious recession, CAB has already carried out sterling work in handling individuals' debt problems in particular. Locally, it deals with debt amounting to some £10 million per annum. It is right to pay tribute to that organisation for the help and assistance that it has given to individuals, and, through the amendment, it will no doubt continue to do so.

Mr Givan: I thank the Member for his contribution. The employees of competent authorities are salaried individuals, and the amendment addresses the fact that the fee should not be going to people on salaries but

to their employer. The amendment will go some way to addressing that.

However, the amendment also builds in flexibility. If an intermediary is not employed through a competent authority, the Department will still be able to pass on the fee to those intermediaries. The amendment makes common sense, and I support it.

Dr McDonnell: On behalf of the SDLP and without delaying the House, I endorse the Bill. It makes perfect sense, is workable and improves our financial sector's efficiency and effectiveness. The amendment is worthy of support, and I support it in every way possible.

Mr Weir: I have been considering this issue lately. As with yesterday's debate on property fraud in Europe, it is not a matter on which I anticipated speaking. Nevertheless, it is of high significance to constituents and it will be an increasing issue for people, whether they come from North Down, Londonderry, Belfast, a rural area or wherever. Consequently, as with any discussion on debt relief, it is important to get the legislation right.

I appreciate that legislation has come into force across the water. Although it is important for us to learn from the experiences in England and to try to draw from them, and, where right, we should learn from good practice and replicate experiences, we must realise that Northern Ireland is a special case. The Prime Minister acknowledged that Northern Ireland is a special case. However, whether he preaches it as a special case, and whether the actions of the Chancellor of the Exchequer match those fine words, remains to be seen. Nevertheless, the issue of debt impinges very heavily on people in Northern Ireland.

I hope to bring a slightly different perspective to the debate. The Chairperson of the Committee, Alban Maginness, dealt eloquently with the range of issues in the Bill, and it is clear that a great deal of hard work on the amendment has gone on in Committee and beyond. In looking at the intricacies of the Bill, I will not try to second-guess what happened in Committee, as it has done sterling work. Unlike any of the Members who spoke previously, all of whom have been members of the Committee and have dealt directly with the Bill, I hope to bring a fresh perspective to the legislation; a fresh perspective that is unencumbered by Committee Stage or any in-depth knowledge and is based

on genuine ignorance. Nevertheless, I hope to bring a fresh perspective. I see that my words are having the desired effect on the Public Gallery.

I suspect that there will be coverage in the media tomorrow of many of the comments made about the dreadful events up in Londonderry, but I suspect that the bread-and-butter issues of the Assembly, such as a Debt Relief Bill and an amendment to it, will not get the same amount of credit.

The amendment goes to the heart of protecting people from debt. We have a greater problem with debt in Northern Ireland, and, therefore, it is important that we get the arrangements in the amendment right and that procedures be put in place. There are a number of aspects to the amendment. First, there is the option of charging fees. It is clear that, although it is an additional service, it is meant to meet the issues that arise from the debt relief scheme in order to ensure that we are properly covered in Northern Ireland. In these stringent times, it is recognised that there is a need for a fee to be charged.

Any action that is taken should not be a burden on the taxpayer. It is right that the service should be provided, but the weight of responsibility on the taxpayer should be kept to a minimum. It is right that there should be a fee, but it must be dealt with in a proper fashion. I am interested to hear whether the Minister has any thoughts on the level of fee. The system must be balanced so that it is cost neutral and does not become a drain on the taxpayer. The fee must also be realistic; it must not be cost prohibitive to someone who is already in debt. The need for the scheme to be effective and the requirement for a reasonable fee to be charged lie at the heart of the amendment.

The amendment takes a sensible approach to the role of intermediaries and the competent authorities by whom they are approved. As the House heard yesterday during the debate on property fraud, it is important that people receive appropriate advice and are dealt with in a professional manner. Consequently, intermediaries must be authorised and have expertise in debt management.

All Members have been visited by constituents seeking advice on a range of matters. Often, those people have already been advised on debt relief and other issues. On some occasions, the advice is good and helps people greatly,

although they still require the assistance of an MLA. I suspect, however, that nine times out of 10, the advice is given by someone who is well meaning but does not have the necessary expertise.

That level of advice on debt relief possibilities has not been helpful, and the smiles that I see around the Chamber indicate that many Members have found themselves in similar positions. It is important that the intermediaries, particularly if there is the flexibility for them to be paid directly, do a professional job and are professionally competent to carry out that task. If intermediaries are to be paid directly, assurances must be given.

The amendment refers to “competent authorities”, and Members mentioned that there is a range of those. The one that most people will think of is Citizens Advice, which is well placed to help to provide and manage the scheme. Unlike Mr Craig, I do not have an interest to declare, but it would be remiss of me not to praise the work of Citizens Advice in my constituency of North Down. Its portfolio of activities would allow it to marry effectively with the debt relief scheme.

It is important that there is flexibility, because there will be slightly different circumstances in different areas. It is also important that we are not too rule-bound when a case goes to an intermediary or to a competent body. The amendment gives the Department the flexibility to choose and to work out a scheme. I am unsure whether any subordinate legislation will be required. The key to the amendment is ensuring that the debt relief scheme works in practice, and I suspect that similar amendments and legislation exist in England.

As I said at the beginning of my contribution, we must ensure that the amendment and the Bill achieve something that is fit for purpose in Northern Ireland and can deal with the problems on the ground. A reasonable fee, an opportunity for work to be carried out through professional intermediaries on behalf of applicants and the flexibility for payments to be made through intermediaries or competent bodies will give us that fit-for-purpose system. It will also allow us to deal with the problems that are likely to escalate during a recession. I commend the amendment to the House, wish the Bill well and look forward to the Minister's response.

11.15 am**The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and**

Investment: I am grateful to the Members from across the House who contributed to the debate on the amendment and, indeed, on the wider reason for bringing forward the Bill. The amendment will allow us a more flexible and efficient way of managing the payment of moneys to meet the intermediary costs that are associated with the administration of the debt relief scheme.

Some Members commented on the timeliness of the legislation. We are operating about one year behind England and Wales in respect of the legislation. However, we have been able to learn from their experiences, and it is for that reason that we are making the amendment. I also want to join Mr Craig, Mr Weir and others in their comments about debt advisers, particularly in Citizens Advice, Advice NI and other bodies, who do sterling work to help those who are in debt across Northern Ireland.

Mr Weir asked about the level of fee that is to be charged to applicants in respect of the costs. The basic point is that the policy aim is that the debt relief scheme will not be a burden on the taxpayer. That means that the cost of operating the scheme, including the payment to meet intermediary costs, must be met through fees that are charged to applicants. However, under the debt relief scheme in England and Wales, the amount is £10. Therefore, the fee is considerably less than that which is levied in relation to bankruptcy and one that is appropriate in all circumstances.

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

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

Clause 2 (Conditions for making a debt relief order)

Mr Speaker: No amendments have been tabled to clause 2, but a Member has indicated a wish to speak on the clause stand part.

Question proposed, That the clause stand part of the Bill.

Ms J McCann: Go raibh maith agat, Mr Speaker. I also welcome the Bill. Obviously, it will help those who experience difficulty with debt

problems, particularly vulnerable people. I want to make some comments and seek assurances from the Minister.

When we look at debt, we have to make a distinction between people who habitually avoid paying their bills and those who, through no fault of their own, cannot afford to pay. I ask that all organisations to which people owe money, from the large utility companies right down, do that when they look at the way in which they try to recover moneys that they are owed. We need to make that distinction, which is why I bring these points to the Minister's attention today.

The first point relates to the six-year rule and exceptional circumstances. The Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment discussed the matter at length, and we heard evidence from Advice NI. Provision for exceptional circumstances should be added to take account of unforeseen changes. I understand the practicalities and the logic that we cannot keep getting debt relief orders through. However, circumstances, such as the death of a partner or an illness, can make a person unable to cope with their financial situation. Therefore, provision for exceptional circumstances should be included.

I also want to make a point about the criteria under which people are eligible. We have been given the criterion of £50 a month surplus income. I seek the Minister's assurance that that could be flexible. For instance, a single parent with four children and a surplus income of £51 is different from a single person who has a surplus income of £49. However, the single person will be eligible and the single parent will not. There should be some flexibility about that.

Debt liability should be increased to £20,000 instead of £15,000. When debt relief orders came into practice in England, pension pots were considered as assets. There is a £300 limit on the pension pot. Pensions give people some financial comfort in their old age. Therefore, it is something that we should look at again. I do not think that pensions should be seen as an asset, especially given that some people have small pots of money that they depend on in their old age.

I ask for the Minister's assurances on those particular points. As I said, my main issue is to differentiate between people who habitually avoid paying their bills and those who, through no fault of their own, genuinely cannot pay.

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and

Investment: Ms McCann raised those issues during Committee Stage. The reason why there is a six-year limit on reapplication for a debt relief order is, essentially, to strike a balance between the needs of debtors, which we have clearly heard over the past couple of years, and the rights of creditors. Some people think that six years is too long and others think that it is too short. However, in my view, a six-year interval is the minimum that should apply in all cases.

In relation to an applicant's surplus income, the question asked was how that could be measured. A person's income from all sources will be compared with their expenditure to determine what surplus, if any, exists. It is intended that a common financial statement will be used to provide an objective assessment of whether an applicant's expenditure is reasonable, and applicants will have to explain and justify any higher levels of expenditure.

Ms McCann talked about a £20,000 cap, but the eligibility cap will be set in subordinate legislation, and it will be subject to Committee scrutiny. Therefore, those points can be raised at the appropriate time. Some people think that £15,000 is too high, but that is a matter that will come before the Committee in subordinate legislation.

The final point relates to pensions being treated as income or assets. In line with what happened in England and Wales, it is the intention that most benefits and pensions will be counted as income. The aim is to have a scheme that will result in intermediaries being able to make a simple and straightforward comparison between income from all sources and expenditure. However, there are certain benefits, such as disability living allowance, which are provided for a specific purpose, and receipt of those benefits should not be seen as an obstacle to accessing the debt relief scheme.

I hope that I have gone some way to answering some of the points raised by Ms McCann. However, some of the issues that she raised will come back to the Committee in subordinate legislation.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 2 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 3 to 9 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Schedule agreed to.

Long Title agreed to.

Mr Speaker: That concludes Consideration Stage of the Debt Relief Bill. The Bill stands referred to the Speaker.

Private Members' Business

Green New Deal

Mr Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for the debate. The proposer of the motion will have 10 minutes in which to propose and 10 minutes in which to make a winding-up speech. One amendment has been selected and published on the Marshalled List. The proposer of the amendment will have 10 minutes in which to propose and five minutes in which to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who wish to speak will have five minutes.

Before I call Sean Neeson to move the motion, I call the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment.

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mrs Foster): Thank you, Mr Speaker, for allowing me to speak at this point. Unfortunately, as I have indicated to you, I must leave the House to attend a funeral. I have informed the proposers of the motion and the amendment that I will be absent for part of the debate. I hope to return to the House after 2.00 pm. I apologise to the House. No discourtesy is meant by my absence, the reason for which is that I must attend to a particular matter.

Mr Neeson: I beg to move

That this Assembly notes the benefits that can be achieved through implementing the green new deal in Northern Ireland; supports the need for improved energy efficiency to reduce fuel use and meet European Union and United Kingdom carbon emissions targets; and calls on the Executive to implement a cross-departmental strategy to ensure that the potential benefits of the green economy are realised for Northern Ireland.

The adoption of a green new deal offers the Government an opportunity to tackle the environmental, economic and social issues that face our society. Northern Ireland is almost completely dependent on imported fossil fuels to meet its energy needs. It relies heavily on oil, which is an unregulated and rapidly depleting finite resource. That presents a number of risks for the future of Northern Ireland's economy. We are heavy polluters, lead unsustainable lifestyles and contribute disproportionately to climate change.

The impact of rising carbon emissions on the planet has been well documented. The

island of Ireland will not be immune to those changes. Research has shown that the likely effects of climate change include rising annual temperatures, wetter winters and drier summers. Those changes will have consequences for agricultural production. As a result of rising sea levels, Belfast and Dublin could become more susceptible to flooding.

Energy costs are high and will continue to grow. The impact of rising fuel costs has been higher bills for consumers. Northern Ireland has the highest level of fuel poverty in the United Kingdom, with approximately 45% of households living in fuel poverty. Households here spend twice as much of their disposable income on energy as households in London, and around 60% more than the UK average.

Fuel poverty is not a phenomenon that is restricted to people who are dependent on benefits, although they are at greatest risk. Of fuel-poor households, around 27% earn between £10,000 and £15,000 a year. The vast majority of homes that are in fuel poverty are owner-occupied. As we are all aware, energy costs are often cited by businesses as their greatest competitive disadvantage. That issue has been discussed in the House on many occasions in the past.

Current sources of energy supply and levels of energy demand are simply unsustainable. The adoption of a green new deal can address those issues. However, the green new deal is not purely about improving Northern Ireland's green credentials and creating a more sustainable supply-and-demand network. It also offers the Executive a viable job- and wealth-creation opportunity. That is particularly relevant in the current climate of austerity and rising unemployment. Potential employment opportunities range from high-tech manufacturing jobs to maintenance jobs at wind-power plants. Employment in the agricultural sector could also be sustained and grown through biomass production.

President Obama has adopted the green new deal in the United States, and that has already had a major impact on the economy there.

11.30 am

In the short term, the retrofitting of our existing housing stock through the implementation of cost-effective energy-efficient measures would create and sustain jobs in the construction

sector. Opportunities for job creation have already been realised by local businesses, including Harland and Wolff. I commend to the House a supplement on energy in Northern Ireland that was produced by the 'Belfast Telegraph' last week. It outlined the major impact that the green new deal has had on production at Harland and Wolff. The jobs created represent only a fraction of what could be achieved if a co-ordinated and ambitious approach were adopted by the Executive. We are already behind our neighbours and European and international competitors, and we urge the Executive to urgently prioritise this agenda.

On a positive note, we believe that there are several factors that can make the growth of the green economy a reality. They include our large pool of highly qualified young people; our strong manufacturing base; our low cost base for labour and physical resources; the slack within the labour market, particularly in the construction sector; our potential to generate renewable energy — Northern Ireland has the second best potential for wind energy in Europe and is second only to Scotland; and the strong research and innovation that is based in our universities.

At the core of a green new deal is improved energy efficiency. It is estimated that the implementation of cost-efficient measures could reduce final energy demand by up to one third. Improved energy efficiency is the quickest and most cost-effective means of reducing demand for energy, emissions and household bills, and it has a short lead-in time in respect of jobs creation. Reducing demand also reduces the investment required in renewable energy provision. When Members were talking about the social economy in the House yesterday, the benefits of the warm homes scheme were highlighted. That is another example of how the green new deal can be improved in Northern Ireland.

With the domestic sector accounting for around 40% of our energy use, tackling energy efficiency in our homes should be a key priority. The Government spend some £70 million per annum on energy-efficient measures. We welcome the fact that that funding is available and that consideration of a supplier obligation is noted in the strategic energy framework. However, we call on the Executive to ensure that available resources are leveraged, as much as possible, to ensure maximum impact and

reach. Additional sources of finance include the European Investment Bank and commercial and social finance institutions. Such mechanisms as pay-as-you-save schemes have the potential to offer an alternative to a grant-driven approach.

We call on the public sector to show leadership as well. Not only would improved energy efficiency reduce the proportion of public money spent on energy, but it might help to drive down the costs of technologies for homes and businesses. The creation of a zero carbon public sector estate by 2015 was stated in the 2006 sustainable development strategy. That target will not be met, and the absence of a target for the public sector from the current sustainable development strategy is disappointing.

With the transport sector accounting for 28% of our energy consumption, tackling energy use in that sector should be a priority. A current lack of emphasis on transport is disappointing and indicates a failure by government to grasp the step change that is required to ensure sustainability. In tandem with expanding renewable energy provision, we must ensure that we have an infrastructure that encourages, supports and facilitates its growth. We support investment in the electricity grid, the ongoing development of the single energy market on the island of Ireland and the development of the North/South interconnector. We also support the proposed EU-wide renewable energy supergrid. An efficient planning system is also required.

Enshrining targets in legislation can drive action and encourage investment. We have targets in place to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and to increase the proportion of electricity that is generated from renewable sources. We are underperforming against our emission targets. Not only that but they fall significantly short of the targets set at international, EU and UK levels. I am pleased to say that the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment is about to embark on a major investigation into energy from renewables.

EU targets for 2020 include a 20% cut in greenhouse gas emissions and energy consumption and a 20% contribution to energy generation from renewable sources. Renewable energy has been broadened to include heat and transport fuels. To meet its obligations, the UK has set a target of 15% of energy from renewable sources by 2020. It has also set a

legally binding target of at least an 80% cut in greenhouse gas emissions.

I realise that the SDLP has tabled an amendment to the motion. The Alliance Party will support it.

Dr McDonnell: I beg to move the following amendment: Insert after “targets;” and before the third “and”

“believes there is a real opportunity to create 30,000 sustainable green-collar jobs;”

I fully support the motion and our brief amendment, which we feel adds to the equation and makes more sense of it.

Turning to the broad thrust of the motion, we talk a lot about energy and about what we should do. However, we cannot go on squandering our resources. Although we have limited resources, we have some considerable, potentially usable, renewable resources here at home. However, we continue to import fossil fuels, such as oil and a little bit of coal. Those meet some 93%, 94% or 95% of our energy needs. That is crazy, economically as well as environmentally. Economically, in effect, there is an energy tax on everything that we do because 10% of our money has to go on energy before we even start looking at making a profit on any of the things that we make, sell or export.

The green new deal is about getting a joined-up approach, and God knows we need it. It is about cutting the consumption of expensive fossil fuels, which eat up 10% of our money. We are told that 90% of homes are still not energy-efficient. In many cases, that leads to severe fuel poverty, which then spills over into welfare needs. We are told through the green new deal that there is a need to improve the energy performance of public and commercial buildings. I think that that is self-evident to most of us. The objective is also to promote renewables in microgeneration and to redirect thousands of people into working the alternative energy. It is about creating a rational, sensible and efficient public transport option. It is also about creating jobs, not just in running the energy service but in making the green goods and services that we can use ourselves and export. Perhaps most of all it is about creating the funding levers that are necessary to unlock the changes.

I will briefly return to domestic energy efficiency. An awful lot of energy is wasted because our houses were built when energy was cheap and

we were flush. There was no issue then. We now have homes being built even today that are not fully energy-efficient. We have to do what is necessary to upgrade building standards to ensure that all new homes are much more efficient and use much less energy. In that way, we must reduce, slowly but steadily, the high levels of fuel poverty, because it is all-pervasive out there.

It makes perfect sense to improve energy efficiency and performance in public buildings, but we have a big job there. We all know that many public buildings are underheated or overheated — more often than not, they are overheated. Even in this Building, how often do we have to open a window to reduce the temperature when the Building is overheated? That is unforgivable. If nothing else, we have to do something in this Building to ensure that we reduce energy consumption and set an example.

Promoting renewables and microgeneration is essential. That is where we most need to get our act together. It requires a cross-departmental approach, as it runs across a number of Departments and interests. If the Assembly does anything, it should create a cross-cutting project on renewable energy.

I appeal to the Minister to take whatever action is appropriate. She will find total support from me and my colleagues. She should act quickly because we are very far behind and very ineffective when it comes to doing something about getting the team working together. I appeal to the Minister to urgently establish the resources in whatever shape or form necessary to drive a meaningful renewables programme, whether in biomass, biogas, wind, wave or even a little bit of hydro. All those items of renewables are here to a greater or lesser extent. They all have potential, yet we do not have a joined-up approach to them. We need more people working together in a more proactive energy division in the Department.

I could go on, Mr Speaker. I could talk about public transport, and we all know the implications of that. I will not delay you today. However, I want to make two other points and make them heavily. We believe that up to 30,000 jobs could be created in Northern Ireland if we attacked renewable energy and its potential in the way that the Danes and other Europeans have done. Those jobs are badly needed and would be

accessible to many made redundant from the construction industry — jobs not only to keep the renewables industry on its feet through projects but jobs in goods and services for the renewables industry, which we, in turn, could export. In this pitch I cannot commend Queen's University highly enough, because it has devoted a lot of its engineering department to energy and renewable energy. Those jobs would be vital to us. I emphasise again, however, that we need a joined-up approach between the energy division in DETI, DARD and Departments such as DRD with regard to public transport.

I am not keen at this difficult time to promote quangos or further quangos, but we need a driver on energy. Further, we need to create the levers to make the green new deal a reality. By that I mean that, despite the difficult times, we need to set aside some small amount of money to stimulate, incentivise and encourage those who are prepared to be entrepreneurial and take risks. That is the echo that I hear every time I meet anybody. I was at a meeting recently with 18 people from the renewables industry who between them had a £1 billion turnover and employed 2,000 people. That is not to be sneezed at in these difficult times, and our renewables industry is in the very early stages. We have to back those who are prepared to take risks and spend their own money. We have got to help those who can and will, if they are allowed to, make the green new deal work. We have got to create the allowance for them and make sure that they are allowed to make it work. I mentioned Europe, and most European countries are far ahead of us on this issue, including Denmark and Germany. Nearly half of energy in Denmark comes from renewables.

The motion and the amendment are self-evident and are easy to support. I endorse them, as do my colleagues, and I urge the whole House to fully back them.

11.45 am

Mr Hamilton: I wholeheartedly endorse the vision behind the green new deal, although not necessarily for some of the reasons that have been put forward by Members so far, including the continued selling of the idea that the consequences of not addressing the problem will be catastrophic. I accept entirely the points that were made by the proposer of the motion about the effects of carbon and the negative effects that it could have on our country and,

indeed, globally. The huge incentive for grasping the potential of a green new deal is not just to help to make Northern Ireland's contribution to fighting those problems; it is the transformative effect that it could have on our economy.

The green new deal is backed by the Confederation of Small Businesses (CBI), Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU), the community and voluntary sector, the Ulster Farmers' Union and Friends of the Earth — an eclectic bunch, if ever there was one. Ordinarily, those organisations would not be able to agree on what day of the week it is. There is probably less agreement among those organisations than there is in the House on occasions. If all those organisations wholeheartedly endorse the green new deal, that should alert us to the positivity that is inherent within it.

Anything that is particularly aimed at gearing our economy and our workforce towards tapping into that huge potential through developing skills is positive. We keep talking about the potential of Northern Ireland in respect of renewable energies. How many times have we heard phrases like, "We could be the Saudi Arabia of renewable energies"? There is a lot of truth in that, but, instead of talking about the potential, we need to start to make it a reality.

There are many positive examples. Harland and Wolff, which operated in a sector that was heavy and hugely industrial, has transformed itself and is now tapping into the renewable energy market. Although it is doing that on a small scale, there is huge potential for the future, which points us in the right direction.

We may have missed the boat in respect of some renewable technologies. I am continually exasperated at how, despite the huge potential here, we have missed the opportunity or are getting in late on the curve with wind power. However, Northern Ireland has huge potential to use tidal power. The SeaGen project in Strangford Lough is the first commercially viable tidal project in the world, so Northern Ireland is at the forefront. Again, Harland and Wolff is involved in that. We have huge potential to get ahead of the market in respect of tidal energy.

I will now focus on my responsibilities in the House as regards social development. I am particularly keen on elements of the green new deal that focus on fuel poverty. We have all heard how the last house condition survey in 2006 found that one third of homes in Northern

Ireland were in fuel poverty. All the indications are that the latest house condition survey will show an increase in that number. So, despite all the actions that have been taken and despite all the effort, it looks like we are going to suffer an increase in the number of homes in fuel poverty, with the figure heading towards 50%. If that happens, we will all have to say that, in spite of the good efforts and the concentration of resources, something else must be done.

The age-old cry "Something must be done", which is regularly heard on phone-in shows across Northern Ireland, is certainly apt, but this report highlights what could be done, particularly in respect of a retrofitting programme. There is some talk already about getting a pilot project to do that. That is inspired by the Kirklees model in Yorkshire where, instead of participation being on the basis of qualifying benefits, the worst hit areas are targeted. We all know that the people who suffer most from fuel poverty tend to be owner-occupiers and tend not to qualify for the likes of the warm homes scheme because they are not on qualifying benefits. If we can find smart information about which areas are in fuel poverty, target them without regard to incomes in the area or the individual's income, retrofit them with insulation and, where appropriate, put in renewable technologies, we can start to get to grips with this problem in a much more concerted and beneficial way than by taking the sporadic, here-and-there approach that we have taken to date.

The other attractive thing is that it is not entirely dependent on public finance but on leveraging in money from the private sector.

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

Mr Hamilton: There is huge potential. We need to act quickly. The changes recommended in the document will take a long time to achieve, and we need to start now.

Mr Speaker: I remind Members to please check that their mobile phones are switched off. Mobile phones or a mobile phone are affecting the recording system in the Chamber.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I welcome the opportunity to speak on the motion. My party supports both the motion and the amendment.

We are all concerned about the impact that climate change can and will have on the global environment. It is imperative that all stakeholders take every opportunity to reverse the trends that suggest that we are in danger of causing irreparable damage to our planet. The green new deal initiative will help in the fight for environmental sustainability. The original New Deal of Roosevelt and the US Government of the 1930s was an attempt to drag that country out of the Great Depression. It is ironic that, although the green new deal was initially formulated to help with the climate change problem, we now find that it can help us to fight our way out of the current financial and economic crisis.

It is clear that the best way to tackle our economic problems is to invest in and support small and medium-sized enterprises. That is the battleground on which we may reverse our fortunes. It is to those businesses that we look for innovation and ideas on the green economy that will translate into jobs and sustainability. That will only be successful if we ensure that we do not merely pay lip service to the initiative. Support and funding need to be accessible to those who require them. The application process for funding needs to be simplified to ensure that support can be enjoyed by businesses other than those already in the upper echelons of success.

Some 90% of our housing falls short of being energy-efficient, much of it publicly funded social housing. The burden of trying to address that issue can be spread out to the private sector, allowing businesses that have a record of success in that area to expand and employ more people to get the work done and greatly reduce the number of homes that fall below the efficiency benchmark.

This is not a dig at any Minister, but, a couple of years ago, we bought off-the-shelf housing and, unfortunately, those houses were not up to the decent homes standard. We must look at building regulations and ensure that they apply across the board in private and social housing standards.

The Department for Employment and Learning has a role to play in ensuring that we have people in research and development who are trained on the viability of the green economy. We must specify training and courses for those

required to implement any new employment unique to the sector.

An issue that can be addressed in a relatively short time frame is the part planning policy has to play if we pursue an agenda of green economics. At present, the system is not green-friendly as regards the time it takes to deal with applications or the success of such applications. There are also questions to be asked about the cost of applications dealing with renewable energy. All those must be addressed if we are to implement a policy that will benefit our environment and help to address the economic problems that we face.

Not so long ago, we released PPS 18, which is a policy on renewable energy with supplementary planning guidelines. Even so, in my constituency, people still find it hard to get approval for small wind energy projects, and those are projects that the House should support. Unfortunately the Minister is absent, but I want to draw to her attention the issue of the Small Wind Energy Group, which, unfortunately, as a result of EU regulations, misses out on the benefits of the renewables obligation certificate system. I put that on record and ask that it be addressed.

Mr I McCrea: The Member raises an interesting issue in respect of wind energy. Many applications go through the system, and, unfortunately, people who do not know a lot tend to object to them. Will the Member encourage all elected representatives to take what is sometimes the less popular position and support what can be a very effective way of producing energy?

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

Mr Boylan: Thank you Mr Speaker, and I thank the Member for his intervention. As long as the proper process is followed, I certainly would support that approach. However, on the SWEG issue, if we are to follow EU regulations, we need the resources and funding that comes with that.

Trillions of pounds have been spent worldwide to prop up the financial sector following the reckless behaviour of some lending institutions. The banks must support the small and medium-sized enterprises at this time, given that 70% to 80% of business in the private sector is made up of them. It is time that the Assembly stood up to the banks and the malpractice that has happened. We have only to look at what is happening in the Twenty-six Counties. I urge

the Assembly to look at measures to ensure that banks support the small and medium-sized enterprises that are finding it very difficult at this time. That applies right across the board and goes for innovation as well.

Supporting green fiscal stimulus measures will go some way towards averting an impending environmental crisis, meeting European targets, reducing our dependence on fossil fuels and kick-starting our economy. Maybe it will even go some way towards ensuring that we do not find ourselves in such a situation. I support the motion and the amendment.

Mr Speaker: Before I call Mr Gardiner, I remind Members once again of one of the conventions of the House. On two occasions this morning, I watched Members walk in front of the Member who was speaking in the Chamber. This issue has been discussed by the Business Committee, and it has been agreed that it is totally discourteous for a Member to walk in front of the Member who has the Floor.

Mr Gardiner: I support the motion and the amendment. Green energy not only provides a sustainable way forward that will help us to guard against the running-down of our carbon resources but has the potential to create jobs, which, given mounting unemployment, has to be an absolute priority for the Assembly and the Executive. Unemployment has grown from 20,000 to almost 60,000 since the recession began. Most disturbing is the growth of youth unemployment, which is higher here than in any part of the country and stands at well over 20%. Like many Members, I am outraged at the squandering of the talent and hopes of our young people, and I want something to be done about it. I have hopes that the creation of jobs in the green economy, which the Carbon Trust believes is capable of producing 33,000 jobs, will help us to address the great social evil of youth unemployment.

At present, there are around 200 companies in the energy sector in Northern Ireland, and they employ about 4,500 people and generate an annual turnover of £300 million. We have a long way to go. According to the Green New Deal Group in Northern Ireland, energy users in the domestic, commercial, industrial, transport and public sectors spend a total of £2.3 billion a year on energy. To put that in context, that represents between 9% and 11% of our gross value added, which is the main measure of

economic output. Ninety-nine per cent of that energy is derived from imported fossil fuels. That is alarmingly and dangerously high.

Northern Ireland has already taken some important steps in the field of green energy. The SeaGen tidal energy converter in Strangford Lough is one indicator of the future.

It was installed two years ago and is based on technology that has been used successfully in Devon.

12.00 noon

Other facilities could follow, with studies reporting significant opportunities for tidal energy capacity off the Antrim coast at Rathlin Island. Harland and Wolff is one of the long-established companies adapting to new circumstances and is firmly established as a provider of equipment for renewable energy supplies. The company uses its experience of the offshore oil and gas equipment market and recently assembled 60 wind turbines for use offshore in the Irish Sea near Scotland. It has won another contract to manufacture a prototype tidal turbine for use in the Orkney Islands.

The use of biomass is also progressing here. The plant at Enniskillen is recognised as a world leader in the conversion of wooden pellets to energy, and I am delighted that one of the first eco-villages at Brokerstown near Lisburn is powered by willow pellets produced near Lurgan, which is in my constituency.

There is also the good news of increased competition in the supply market for commercial residential customers. Scottish and Southern Energy has just entered the residential market through its Airtricity division, promising its customers cost savings of up to 14% on their electricity bills. It already supplies 10,000 business customers in Northern Ireland and 200,000 in the Republic of Ireland. Airtricity operates six wind farms in Northern Ireland.

The new green policy is much more acceptable to unionists than the old green policy. Green energy means sustainability.

Mr Frew: I support the motion and the amendment in principle. In an economic depression, when a country is on its knees and is unable even to crawl forward, that is the time to plan and prepare for the next sprint. The priority for the Assembly must be, and is, the economy and everything that springs from it. We have

to ensure that we have set the conditions to lessen the burdens on the most vulnerable people, to soften the blows to business and, most importantly, to plan for the future and for recovery.

US President Franklin Roosevelt knew that only too well when he galvanised the American people at the time of the national banking system collapse in the 1930s. Roosevelt told his people that it was:

"time to speak the truth, the whole truth, frankly and boldly. Nor need we shrink from honestly facing conditions in our country today. This great Nation will endure as it has endured, will revive and will prosper."

He said:

"the only thing we have to fear is fear itself — nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance ... a host of unemployed citizens face the grim problem of existence, and an equally great number toil with little return."

Roosevelt said:

"Only a foolish optimist can deny the dark realities of the moment."

He also said:

"when there is no vision the people perish."

What is our vision? Knowing what we want to achieve is not enough. We must know how to achieve it. Words can be spoken in the House, but it is the actions that we take outside that count. What will be the factors that will keep our country in recession? When this country recovers, what will be the next big crisis? Those are the issues that we must concern ourselves with.

The next problem could well be the cost of energy. Around 10% of Northern Ireland's income is spent on importing fossil fuels, on which we are 99% dependent for energy. We spend £2.3 billion a year on energy. As a country, we could be held to ransom by rising energy prices. Unless we act quickly to reduce that dependence, it could cause serious economic failure and push many more people into fuel poverty. The best time to do that is now, as we plan our recovery. We need to reduce our dependence on fossil fuels and create a stimulant for employment.

There are some 705,000 dwellings in Northern Ireland, over 90% of which still fall short of the best energy performance standards. Surely, it is the same in our factories, commercial buildings, schools and hospitals. Around 25% of our unemployed have come from the construction industry. There are people waiting to be re-employed who know and can do the work. There are people from the electrical and mechanical engineering sector who have knowledge of energy sources, the ability to integrate energy systems and experience of project management. They know and understand the built form. If those buildings were targeted, it could reduce unemployment and help the needy who are caught up in fuel poverty.

We could retrofit most of the building stock with energy-efficiency measures, which would provide work and a market for products from the environmental goods and services sector. I believe that that is the way forward. It will help our people and create employment at the same time, but it will not be enough on its own. We need to keep up our capital spending and to maintain our infrastructure. However, practices will have to change. The equipment and its installation will have to be affordable. That is where the problem has lain to date. People cannot afford to put such equipment into their houses.

Who will pay for this, and what incentives can the Government give? How many years will it take to pay for itself? Those are the questions that the people have been asking and will continue to ask if we move forward in this vein. I am not sure whether the House has the answers to those questions.

I also mention lignite mining. It would be a very retrograde step if that were to raise its head again in north Antrim or elsewhere in this country.

Mr W Clarke: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I support the motion and the amendment. I thank the Members for tabling it.

I pay tribute to the green new deal group, which drew inspiration from the tone of Roosevelt's comprehensive response to the Great Depression and proposed a modernised version — a green new deal — that is designed to power a renewables revolution and to create thousands of green-collar jobs in Europe and the world.

The green new deal, as many other Members touched on, provides us with a good opportunity

to tackle the recession, rising energy prices and climate change. We are an island; we need to waken up to that reality. Fossil fuels are running out. Oil prices continue to rise, and, when we get into recovery, they will go through the roof. We will not be able to afford to run our cars or heat our homes, so we need to plan now. That is what the green new deal is about.

The energy efficiency of our homes is just not up to spec. Too many homes are letting too much energy escape. People may as well just open their windows and let the heat out of their homes. That is the scenario for the vast majority of homes. The Member across the way who spoke before me touched on the fact that too many people cannot afford to make their homes energy efficient. People in the middle income brackets cannot afford to do so, and people in old social housing do not have the efficiency that they require.

Members will probably talk about funding and ask how the green new deal will be resourced. An innovative scheme has just been launched in Birmingham. The Birmingham new deal plans to fit power-generating solar panels to council-owned properties. It is being pushed through this week, and around 10,000 homes will have that new technology put in place.

The Birmingham energy savers programme will be funded jointly by the city council, energy suppliers and, above all, commercial banks. It follows the success of two pilot schemes in Birmingham. Banks and financial institutions largely got us into this mess, so they have to step up to the mark by backing schemes now by providing borrowing on long-term agreements. Residents and businesses in Birmingham have the opportunity to cut carbon pollution and to save thousands of pounds by reducing their bills, and what is happening there could be replicated in the North. Under the scheme, commercial banks will provide half the up-front investment, supplemented by £25 million from energy companies and £25 million borrowed by the council. Consumers will pay a levy on their energy bills over the repayment period of the loans — around 25 years.

I will touch on some of the difficulties that I find in my constituency. Simon Hamilton mentioned one of the good projects: the tidal project in Strangford Lough is a success and is leading the way in new technologies. However, we in South Down are working on a district heating

scheme in Newcastle that has the potential to create jobs. The project would benefit people through the use of a central, biomass heating system that would provide power for sheltered accommodation, schools and a new leisure centre, yet to be built. However, trying to get Departments around a table to even look at such a proposal is like banging my head off a wall. The public want it to be done and people are willing to do it, but there are always obstacles. Civil servants will always find obstacles. Even if four or five Departments are brought around a table, they will blame somebody else.

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

Mr W Clarke: I will indeed, Mr Speaker.

To finish, the banks have a duty to provide money and to be at the forefront. We need to look at our social housing stock —

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Mr W Clarke: — and use that as collateral to obtain the necessary funding to introduce the green new deal.

Mr Speaker: I must insist that the Member's time is up.

Mr Beggs: I support the motion. The green new deal contains a lot of ideas, some of them radical, that will bring environmental issues to the fore, and I commend that. More needs to be done to create a green economy. More sustainable methods of producing electricity, in particular, and of heating our homes need to be created. We are over-dependent on fossil fuels that must be imported — more than 90% of our energy comes from them. Oil and gas prices have fluctuated hugely in the past years. In 2009, oil prices reached \$150 a barrel. With peak oil production thought to have already occurred, we can expect only high prices and continuing rises in the future. That will endanger local companies and cause additional problems with fuel poverty, and so on.

The utilisation of onshore and offshore wind farms, bioenergy, tidal energy and geothermal energy will mean less dependence on other energy sources and will create sustainable sources of power. Fortunately, Northern Ireland has excellent companies at the forefront of the field. I think of B9 Energy in my constituency, which has led the way in Northern Ireland on

wind power and is investigating the tidal energy prospects at Torr Head.

We need also to rethink energy use in our power stations to ensure that they do not waste energy. At the moment, waste energy is simply pumped out to sea. That is a waste and does not happen in many plants on mainland Europe, where secondary use is made of waste heat from power stations.

We need to encourage combined heat and power schemes. Ideas such as refurbishing thousands of homes with full insulation and renewable energy are not new. We have seen that happen elsewhere. We have the warm homes scheme, which could be extended so that more could benefit from better homes with more insulation.

As others have said, the Calderdale and Kirklees energy savers scheme and Kirklees Council's warm zone project, which began in 2007, show that, with incentives, it is possible to encourage significant improvements and to leverage significant additional amounts of money to enable that to happen.

12.15 pm

Our dependence on imported fossil fuels will have to be replaced increasingly by an emphasis on sustainable energy and energy efficiency. The green new deal mentions creating 24,000 green-collar jobs, which would be commendable if it were possible without unduly affecting other forms of employment. It is essential that we create additional jobs, and there is potential for that. However, we must take care that we do not drive up the cost of electricity here unduly and simply endanger other jobs, such as those in manufacturing. We must keep energy prices competitive.

The amendment mentions 30,000 new jobs. I must admit that I was surprised that that amendment was selected. That point could have been made in debate, and it would be helpful in the summing up to hear evidence of a business case to back up that number.

Another area that should be worked on is Building Control's insulation standards, which have increased in the past number of years. Nevertheless, surely they should be further increased now, not many years in the future. The most efficient time to insulate a house is when it is built. There is no point coming back

to existing homes in 10 or 20 years to upgrade them. It is uneconomical to do that, so it is much better to do it now. However, we must appreciate that doing even that involves cost. Not only is there a cost involved in retrofitting; there is a cost to increasing standards. Nevertheless, we should face those costs and ensure that it happens.

There are some flaws in the ideology of the green new deal, most worryingly the figure of £2.3 billion that will be required to fund such a venture. I understand that some £750 million will be required locally. Therefore, we need a clear business case for how it will happen. I would like it to happen, but where exactly will the money come from? I understand that European regulations will restrict DETI's flexibility to support companies in the area of the environment.

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

Mr Beggs: Energy efficiency will be an important way to assist the economy.

Mr McDevitt: The Government in Northern Ireland spend about £2.4 billion a year on goods and services. In some ways, the question that we are debating is whether we are using that amazing purchasing power to promote local jobs and sustainability in its widest sense. On so many fronts, the sad answer is no. Our new roads are being built by multinationals; the social clauses are hardly worth the paper that they are written on; employment opportunities are temporary and the profits leave; our oil comes from Russia; our training needs are sometimes being met by companies with little more than a mobile telephone number in the region; and, as many of us feel, the Executive spend more time investing in other people's economies, than doing so sustainably in our own.

It is an obvious example, but many Members mentioned the fact that £9 out of every £10 that we spend on energy leaves the region. One wonders why oligarchs are able to own Premier League football teams. The answer is in any NIE bill; we are paying for them, and if we do not change our behaviour, we will continue to pay for them. It is for that reason that we are long past the point at which we need a big idea. We need a strategy with the short-, medium- and long-term potential to transform our regional economy, which understands its great strengths and can build on its industrial, engineering and

agriculture heritages, and which must be capable of coalescing those of us in the Chamber and, apparently with much more difficulty, those who work in our silo Departments.

As Mr Hamilton said, a green new deal is not just a programme to address the sustainability challenges that the region will face. It could become the key platform on which we build jobs for future generations.

It is not the case that green-collar jobs do not exist today. Mr Beggs asked where we got the figure of 30,000 from. We got it from the report, which estimated that, if the proper investments were made in the right way, the potential out-turn would be 30,000 jobs. The truth is that jobs that are being done by people in all sorts of sectors are not sustainable, but they could be if we were to change the focus of the economy.

Green-collar jobs are bus builder and bus drivers' jobs, but those will exist only if DRD invests seriously in sustainable transport, which it does not do today. Over the past decade, we have missed all our targets, choosing instead to invest in unsustainable transport. There are fitter and electricians' jobs, but only if DETI unlocks the opportunity for renewable energy, something that it does not do today. We simply talk about renewable energy, but we do not invest in it meaningfully or seriously. There are jobs for builders, brickies, carpenters and plumbers, but only if we go beyond talking about the retrofitting opportunity and start to look at the business models that would deliver it.

Government in this region has an obsession with delivering services, but, sometimes, it should just commission them. Many in the community and voluntary sector and in the social enterprise sector can and would create local jobs in the sort of projects about which Mr Frew spoke so eloquently.

Green-collar jobs can be science jobs and academic jobs, but only if we align our innovation policies with our economic strategy. That is what the independent review of economic policy told us to do. If truth be told, we paid no attention. Green-collar jobs can be entrepreneurial, but only if we unlock the funding opportunities by investing in bonding and other imaginative new ways of raising revenue for the region. We must also understand that venture capital has a place but that it must align itself with the rest of the economy.

The SDLP was happy to table the amendment outlining the jobs potential, because it makes the motion real. It makes this a tangible debate about something that could transform the economy, but only if Departments fundamentally change their behaviour. They must stop regarding sustainability as something to put at the end of reports. They must start to see it as something that they put right at the beginning of reports and at the centre of policy.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I support the motion. In the current economic climate, there is a danger that green issues and climate change will be forgotten. I welcome the motion, and we should all realise that, by tackling the issues innovatively, we can create key economic drivers that will aid economic recovery.

A more sustainable economy is one that is less reliant on finite fuels, and, fortunately, we have wind resource in abundance, as well as many wave and tidal energy opportunities. The ongoing work in Strangford Lough, which has been highlighted, is a good example of that. To reduce the total energy costs, we must prioritise simple insulation measures, the introduction of renewable energy into domestic homes and the improvement of public transport. As my colleague Cathal Boylan said, 90% of housing is not energy efficient, and that simply is not good enough.

Planning applications for renewable measures such as wind turbines must be processed more efficiently. I agree with Mr McCrea's point about the objections to a number of such applications. He is correct to say that non-genuine objections that are reactionary, based on Nimbyism and designed to scaremonger should be countered. Political leaders from the Assembly should do so.

Dr Farry: I concur fully with the Member. In light of his remarks, will he consider the opposition to the North/South interconnector, which is part of a smart grid that is important for renewables?

Mr Speaker: The Member will have an extra minute added to his time.

Mr McKay: Reactionary objections and those that are based on Nimbyism should be opposed, but any genuine concerns about health effects should be taken into account.

In my area of North Antrim, I am very supportive, and always have been, of wind energy applications.

We are opposed to Nimbyism. However, if a planning application has an impact — for example, if it is too close to an area that relies on tourism — that should be taken into account. However, a carte blanche approach should not be taken to planning applications, because that would result in a free-for-all. Certain key issues need to be taken into consideration.

Even if there is wide public opposition to some planning applications, political leadership needs to be shown. Politicians should put their foot forward and ensure that those planning applications go ahead. We have renewable energy targets to meet, and, as the Member for South Belfast Mr McDevitt said, we need to be less reliant on oil from Russia and finite fuels. There is a need for politicians from all parties to unite around applications in certain constituencies. If there were joint political leadership on applications from the renewable energy industry, we would see our targets met more rapidly.

Wind turbines are much more pleasing to the eye than incinerators, nuclear power plants and, as the Member for North Antrim Mr Frew said, lignite mines. Therefore, there are many benefits to developing the wind turbine industry.

Social impacts could be offset by proposals in the green new deal. Many older people live in homes that are energy inefficient, and we are well aware of the campaigns run by non-governmental organisations on older people having to choose between heating and eating. According to statistics, older people's poverty has increased in recent years, and that is something on which we need to take action. Ensuring energy efficiency in the homes of those who need it most must continue to be an Executive priority, particularly given the economic challenges that lie ahead.

To summarise, the green new deal has a great deal of potential. It has the potential to create new jobs; to assist the construction industry in a meaningful way; and to develop the island, and this part of the island, to make it a world leader in renewables. We need to grasp that potential and ensure that the issue becomes a priority for the Assembly and the Executive. We need to be mindful that the issue does not get left behind because of the current economic climate. The green new deal needs to be a priority and must form part of the Executive's strategy for economic recovery.

Mr B Wilson: I support the motion and the amendment. I am delighted to see such unanimity in the Chamber today.

The Green Party has been a long-standing supporter of the green new deal. Indeed, it was a supporter long before the green new deal group was set up, and our party manifesto for the 2009 European election was titled 'A Green New Deal for Europe'. That was a common manifesto with 27 other Green parties throughout the European Union, and it highlighted how the green economy had created thousands of jobs in many European countries, particularly in Germany, Denmark and Spain. In Germany alone, 250,000 jobs have been created. We argued that, on the basis of the experiences of those countries, we could create five million green-collar jobs throughout the European Union. It is clear that many voters recognised the potential of green jobs, with the Green Party achieving its greatest success, returning 53 MEPs and, locally, our candidate, Steven Agnew, tripling the green vote.

I launched that manifesto at Harland and Wolff to highlight how that company was reaping the benefits of new green technology. The company, which was at the forefront of the industrial revolution, is now at the forefront of a new green revolution and is adapting traditional local skills in construction and engineering to promote the new green economy. Since then, Harland and Wolff has expanded its involvement in the green economy, and I congratulate it on its recent announcement of a £10 million contract to construct 30 huge wind turbines and a multimillion pound contract to design and build two platforms for an offshore wind development. Those will provide more much-needed jobs.

12.30 pm

Harland and Wolff has been one of the few good news stories during the recession, and that is clearly due to its foresight in entering the ever-expanding green economy as well as its expertise and facilities, which are unique. It is an example of the green new deal in action. It is not enough to say that we are focusing on the economy. We must focus our energy and investment on the new technologies that are required to help us to move to a low-carbon economy that is not reliant on imported fossil fuels but is based instead on sustainable forms of energy, transport and food production. A success story such as Harland and Wolff should not be an isolated incident: it must become a

common occurrence. Fossil fuels are running out, but Northern Ireland, with its natural resources of wind and wave, can become a world leader in green energy.

Another green success is the 150 new jobs that solar energy firm Kingspan Renewables created. It bought Thermomax, which was based in Bangor and which we were very supportive of. That is where we should be targeting investment, and that example demonstrates the potential of new jobs in the green economy. We have been pointing that out for many years with perhaps somewhat limited success.

Our targets for renewable energy should be more ambitious. Scotland's First Minister, Alex Salmond, has increased Scotland's targets for renewables to 80% by 2020, and the Welsh Assembly recently announced that its share from renewables will increase by 200% by 2020. There is potential for growth, and we should expand our renewables targets and exports. Those are ambitious targets, but with our natural resources and the support of the Executive, we can achieve similar targets.

Unfortunately, the record to date shows that the Assembly has not fully grasped the green new deal. For example, we had a situation some years ago where DETI stopped funding the Reconnect grants for the development of renewable energy and small microgeneration systems as well as the Renewable Energy Installer Academy that trained people to work the installers. That was very short-sighted.

I also refer to the Programme for Government. We are talking about sustainability —

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

Mr B Wilson: There is a proposal from Westminster to scrap the Sustainable Development Commission. I appeal to the Executive to fund that commission even though it may not be funded by Westminster.

Mr Speaker: The Business Committee has arranged to meet immediately upon the lunchtime suspension. I, therefore, propose, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until 2.00 pm, when the Minister will respond to the debate.

The sitting was suspended at 12.32 pm.

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

2.00 pm

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:

I apologise for my absence during the debate. However, my copious note-takers will, I hope, enable me to reflect the debate in my comments.

The debate is timely, in so far as Members are aware that the Department's strategic energy framework (SEF) was formally launched on 27 September, and I understand that Members referred to that. A key priority in that document is ensuring that energy savings are gained from improving energy efficiency and that such savings are recognised, prioritised and put into action. The green economy is another key area that is highlighted in the SEF, and it was acknowledged by several Members, as is the need to strengthen cross-departmental working. I am pleased that DETI already leads the way on those issues, and I am glad that many of the same issues are to the fore in the green new deal proposals.

We all recognise the current lack of investment in energy efficiency measures in homes and non-domestic buildings. That has resulted in many properties across Northern Ireland having poor energy ratings, and virtually all Members who contributed to the debate raised that issue. That is despite the fact that investment in such measures can produce tangible savings on future energy bills. It is clear that, alongside investment in new energy infrastructure, we need to reduce our energy demand. Therefore, energy efficiency must increasingly become part of energy policy. The green economy is not only about the ability to produce clean energy; it is about growing the market for products that consume less energy.

By improving Northern Ireland's energy efficiency, we will, undoubtedly, help to deliver our climate change targets and those of the UK, which will help with the security of supply. Mr Neeson raised the important point that we are underperforming by not meeting our targets to reduce emissions. However, we must be aware that emissions in Northern Ireland tend to be higher because of its more dispersed population and the resultant heavy reliance on road transport. Undoubtedly, that presents us with more of a challenge.

Mr Wilson felt that our renewable targets were, perhaps, not as ambitious as they should be, and he made a comparison with Scotland. However, our 40% target is evidence-based and approaches the maximum that even a strengthened Northern Ireland grid could accommodate without jeopardising its stability. Therefore, the 40% target in the SEF is correct, and that is without taking into account the obvious geographical differences between Northern Ireland and Scotland, the most notable being how much of Scotland is covered in forestry and the fact that it has a much longer coastline, both of which have an impact on its targets.

Energy efficiency will also help us to save money for business. It is increasingly clear that energy efficiency will become a key benchmark of globally competitive companies in this century. Increased energy efficiency is necessary for many of our international companies. Although we know that energy saving is the cheapest way of closing the gap between demand and supply, it remains the Cinderella at the energy ball.

On the near horizon, energy saving will mean smart meters and smart grids that will give the consumer control over appliances. Although those will take a long time to develop, there is much that we can do now. A great deal is already being done across government, some of which I will outline.

Paul Frew, Simon Hamilton, Roy Beggs and Willie Clarke all mentioned the first of those issues, which is a reduction in carbon emissions. There is no doubt that the approach of the green new deal offers substantial opportunities to retrofit energy efficiency in a significant number of domestic and non-domestic buildings. It will also help to create new jobs while reducing energy bills and carbon emissions.

The business sector is driven to reduce carbon emissions through a variety of mechanisms such as the EU emissions trading scheme, climate change agreements and the carbon reduction commitment. The latter, in particular, covers large public and private sector organisations and will capture around 10% of our emissions in Northern Ireland. Organisations that qualify for participation must monitor emissions from energy use, report those emissions annually and purchase and surrender a corresponding number of allowances. A number of Members made the point that government should lead by example in this area. I am pleased to say

that we are doing so in Northern Ireland, and a number of Departments participate in the scheme, even though they do not meet the qualification threshold. By 2020, the carbon reduction commitment is expected to have delivered emission savings of at least 132,000 tons of carbon dioxide in Northern Ireland and to have saved those participating in the scheme between £20 million and £30 million a year through cost-effective energy efficiency measures that have not yet been taken up.

The green new deal approach, working alongside existing government initiatives, could unlock significant expenditure in the coming years. By creating a new market opportunity, we could provide another major opportunity for economic growth and employment. Indeed, that is the main thrust of the amendment. That would also undoubtedly help to drive economic recovery. The market is big, and Northern Ireland needs to strive to improve its energy efficiency in all properties and make them affordable to all. However, we must be mindful to put the correct financial framework in place at the outset. A model with a pay-as-you-save concept at its heart offers the best opportunity for everyone. In that model, the private sector would pay for the work up front through networks of green deal providers, and it would allow house owners or tenants of non-domestic buildings to pay their energy bills back over time from the energy savings that they make.

Roy Beggs and Sean Neeson mentioned the implications of being able to build a business case on a sustainable way forward. Mr Clarke gave Birmingham as an example. Banks and energy suppliers have been working together to find ways to make energy efficiency work for them in that city. I absolutely believe in that method. Realistically, substantial recurring government funding will not continue to be available in the current economic climate. Therefore, rather than have a system that relies on that funding, the best model is one in which savings pay for the efficiencies in the future. However, such a system will need some form of legal underpinning to give it the necessary longevity to bring confidence to investors and those involved in the supply chain. Such a longer-term view will deliver a green growth sector that can offer a big boost to our economic recovery. All in all, I believe that a private sector-financed green new deal concept could transform the energy efficiency of Northern Ireland's building stock while sending

the right signal to the energy efficiency industry and providing investment confidence and job opportunities.

The debate also focused heavily on fuel poverty. An approach that ties energy savings to the people who pay the energy bills will be a breakthrough for house owners and tenants. Some people, such as the fuel poor, will need extra help. Energy savings alone will not be enough, and I recognise that. However, a competitive market will provide the best value and confidence in products for the customer.

In Northern Ireland, 70% of the houses that we will live in by 2050 have been built already. Added to that, we have some of the oldest housing stock in Europe, much of which was built in the era of cheap coal. However, that is no excuse. Much work is under way to improve the housing stock, and I know that Sammy Wilson and his Department are moving quickly to strengthen those building standards.

In addition, the implementation of the EU directive on the energy performance of buildings has resulted in the production of almost 94,000 certificates. That is a visible sign of the energy efficiency of buildings within which services are provided to the public. The Executive have already agreed to use domestic rates relief to drive the energy efficiency measures. Both the energy efficiency homes scheme and the low carbon homes scheme have been introduced recently to improve the energy efficiency of the housing stock here by encouraging the development of low- and zero-carbon homes. The Department will continue to work with the Department for Social Development (DSD) in relation to fuel poverty matters.

In line with the aspirations of the green new deal, there is huge potential for green jobs in the region, both in energy efficiency and renewable energy. Members mentioned specific examples including Harland and Wolff, B9 Energy, the Marine Current Turbines installation at Strangford and the Kingspan works in Portadown. The renewable energy sector is one of the fastest growing sectors in the economy. The opportunities to create employment, generate wealth and develop a local skills base in the sector are substantial, as colleagues acknowledged today.

The growing demand for renewable energy and renewable energy technologies is one that Northern Ireland is very well placed to meet,

not only because of our geographical location but because of the capabilities and skills of our local businesses, universities and colleges; I say that very strongly. Dr McDonnell mentioned Queen's University specifically in that regard, but there are other colleges of further education that do a tremendous job in the renewable arena.

Developing the sector is a strategic priority for Invest Northern Ireland. Significant activity has been undertaken, not only to provide support for the small and medium-sized enterprises in the renewable energy sector but to develop new technologies and provide companies that have a desire to look at the new export markets with a framework of support to develop and grow their business. Since April 2009, Invest NI clients in the renewable energy sector have received financial assistance amounting to £5.2 million, against total investment costs of £25.6 million, for a range of activities including research and development, training, job creation and the development of collaborative networks.

Cross-departmental working has been mentioned throughout the debate. For some time now, DETI has, through the sustainable energy interdepartmental working group, co-ordinated cross-departmental working on sustainable energy to give a clear message to stakeholders, whether from industry, energy companies or environmental groups, that we in the Executive recognise the opportunities and the challenges that the sustainable energy agenda presents. Indeed, we were instrumental in ensuring that many of the green new deal priorities were included in the Executive's options package for addressing the economic downturn.

Shortly, I will bring forward proposals from the work of that interdepartmental group with recommendations on how to maximise sustainable energy policy initiatives in Northern Ireland. In addition, the Department for Employment and Learning is already working with stakeholders to address identified skill needs and develop new fit-for-purpose courses and qualifications to support and advance the sector. We will continue to work cross-departmentally on energy efficiency and renewable energy. We will seek to work with others to develop the green new deal concept with a sufficient legal underpinning that offers opportunities to all.

I welcome the green new deal proposals. However, we must be mindful of the current financial

climate and, therefore, work together to develop an innovative green deal financing option that will stand the test of time and, thereby, embed energy efficiency and renewable energy across all aspects of our society.

2.15 pm

Mr A Maginness: I thank Mr Neeson and his colleagues for tabling today's important motion. They have done us a service by highlighting the issue of the green new deal. I feel a bit sorry for Mr Wilson, not because he is not a passionate supporter of the green new deal but because the Green Party pioneered the original concept of the green agenda and, in a way, his political clothes have been stolen by all of us. We owe it to the people who pioneered the green agenda politically to recognise what they did and to highlight the fact that they brought about a radical change in thinking not only on the environment but on the economy and many other aspects of our society.

It is important that we continue to develop the green agenda in the Assembly and in the Executive. The Minister rightly pointed out that she regards it as a priority. The Minister and the Executive accept the concept of the green new deal. However, it seems to me and to colleagues that the issue of the green agenda, renewable energy and so forth is relatively confined to the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, and there does not seem to be collective acceptance of the entire Executive's responsibility. We should try to persuade the Executive to embrace the issue in a much more wholehearted fashion.

Many Members spoke today. Simon Hamilton, who is not in the Chamber at the moment, spoke in a slightly sceptical mode, not quite à la Mr Wilson — Mr Sammy Wilson, I hasten to add — but in that political school of thought. Nonetheless, he recognised the need for the green new deal. Whether for reasons of climate change or not, the fact is that it is good for our society and our economy. Generally speaking, he was supportive, which is important.

Other Members who spoke included Mr Boylan, Mr Gardiner, Mr Frew, Mr Clarke, Mr Beggs, Mr McDevitt and Mr McKay. They all emphasised the need for the Executive and the Government to embrace the new ideas arising from the green agenda. It is important for us to remind ourselves that, geographically, the island of Ireland is probably uniquely placed to develop,

in a great sense, renewable energy. We have wind, sea and grass here, and those three elements are important in the development of renewable energy. We know about wind, and we know that we can harness the potential of wind here more than any other part of Europe. We should increase and deepen our efforts to do that and build that potential, not just onshore but offshore.

Mr Gardiner, Mr Frew and others mentioned SeaGen.

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

Mr A Maginness: In conclusion, I support the motion and the amendment, and I hope that colleagues will pass the motion today.

Dr Farry: We have had a healthy and positive debate. However, it will only be meaningful if it used as a platform from which the Assembly can move forward. I certainly recognise the work that has been done and is being done, not only by DETI but by other Departments, but we need to take it to a new level.

The motion is not an endorsement of any particular set of proposals from one organisation; rather, it is about the Assembly embracing the concept of a green new deal and, indeed, the opportunities that it presents for Northern Ireland. That said, it is appropriate to pay tribute to the Green New Deal Group and the work that it has done, as well as to recognise, as Simon Hamilton mentioned, the almost unique coalescence of the business community, trade unions, the community and voluntary sector, farmers and the environmental lobby behind a common agenda. There is certainly a powerful lesson in that.

There are three important rationales for why the Assembly should address the green new deal. Obviously, there is the environmental agenda with regard to the need to combat climate change and to adapt to the reality of it, partly to avoid the negative economic consequences that will flow if we do not do that. The Stern report set out those consequences and the economic cost in graphic detail. There is also the economic rationale. I want to talk about opportunities for new types of economic activity and increased employment. Indeed, the amendment brings more detail to that. Now we talk about green-collar jobs as well as white-collar jobs and blue-collar jobs. There is also the important issue of the energy costs faced

by businesses, households and, indeed, us in the public sector and how to move to a greater sense of energy security. The problem is not so much that energy comes from overseas but our overdependence on fossil fuels that may not be available for ever. Finally, we have the social benefits. Most clearly, there is a need to address fuel poverty, which my colleague Sean Neeson explained ably at the beginning of the debate.

There are probably four key areas for action. One is energy efficiency, which is, perhaps, the key area in which most work can be done in the shortest period. It is also the area where there is potential for quite a labour-intensive set of activities to be taken forward. In view of the unemployment problem, particularly in the construction sector, that is very relevant. Another area is renewable energy, where there is a platform on which we can build. It is important to stress, as Alban Maginness mentioned, that that covers more than just onshore or offshore wind. A further area is the grid infrastructure and the need for a smart grid and smart meters, as the Minister said. I want to emphasise the importance of the North/South interconnector in that framework. Another important issue is transport. The transport system is inefficient and a strong contributor to Northern Ireland's carbon footprint, which is the highest of any UK region.

The Minister set out what is being done in Northern Ireland not only by her Department but through the actions of other Departments. I certainly recognise what is happening. I welcome the publication of the strategic energy framework. Indeed, I acknowledge that we have our own local renewables targets and are on track to meet them.

The issue for us today is to focus on what more can be done, not just by DETI and other Departments but by the Executive as a whole. First and foremost, it is important that government embraces the language of the green new deal and the green economy. Indeed, I hope that it becomes a clear theme in the next Programme for Government, which, hopefully, we will address later on this autumn. Other societies have embraced that language and concept more actively than Northern Ireland. Scotland, Denmark and Germany were mentioned in the debate. Certainly, there is a perception that the UK as a whole is behind the

curve when compared with the wider European Union and other international examples.

In the UK context, Northern Ireland is behind other regions. Therefore, there is a lot of room for improvement. We have targets for renewable energy but not for energy efficiency or the transport sector, both of which are major problems in Northern Ireland. There are no local targets for climate change. Northern Ireland would benefit from its own dedicated climate change Act, such as those that other UK regions have taken forward. The cross-sectoral advisory group addressed the use of renewables as a short-term action. That was welcomed, but, bizarrely, energy efficiency was seen as a long-term action to be taken forward in areas such as the wider market. Access to resourcing for the green new deal was seen as something that could not be done in Northern Ireland. Those are warning signs that I think we should be worried about.

There is a clear need for leadership when considering the energy efficiency of the public sector estate. We used to have targets on how quickly we would have a zero-carbon estate. However, those targets are now not going to be met. Again, we would still have the opportunity to make that happen. We need to reconsider the issue of grant aid for energy efficiency in homes. That has also been taken off the table, but it needs to come back on to the table. We need to look at feed-in tariffs as an evolutionary step away from merely talking about renewables obligation certificates, the so-called ROCs. We must address our transport system and look at the balance that we have between the use of the private car and public transport. The ratio in the investment strategy is 80:20 in favour of private transport. That is well out of line with most other regions in Europe, even those that have a similar rural population profile to ours.

We also have to look at our planning system and ask ourselves whether it is fit for purpose. Are PPS 18 and, in particular, the supplementary planning guidance sufficiently robust to ensure that we are able to make speedy decisions with investments? Feedback is still coming through that the process is taking too long and there is still too much uncertainty. People do not mind being turned down; they object to being left hanging around and being made unsure about whether their plans will be taken forward.

There is a critical issue with how we fund what needs to happen. Like everyone else, I am conscious of our difficult public expenditure context. However, we are talking about leveraging the private sector and about creating the necessary levers and incentives to ensure that the work that needs to happen in our society is encouraged. In that context, we are also talking about the need to stimulate a strong private sector and market-focused approach to addressing the problems.

It is important to recognise that a host of Departments can bring something to the table. A theme that has emerged from the debate is that, although good work is being done and Departments are co-operating with each other, the Executive are not embracing the issue properly as an overarching theme. There is no sense of how all the available programmes, policies, levers and incentives fit together into a single model that will demonstrate how the green economy can be taken forward and how we in Northern Ireland can meet our share of the wider climate change objectives that we have to face up to.

We need to see how all that can work together. Under DETI, we have the strategic energy framework and the good work that Invest Northern Ireland takes forward in encouraging the sector. The Department for Employment and Learning has an important role to play in providing the skills for the green economy. Indeed, the Minister referred to the work of the universities and colleges in that area. The Department of Finance and Personnel has a role to play with building regulations and the speed with which we can move ahead with the code for sustainable homes. There are still issues to deal with on the level of uptake in the rate rebates under low- and zero-carbon homes, on energy efficiency for homes and on the responsibility for energy efficiency in the public sector estate. OFMDFM has a role to play in the sustainable development strategy, which has been recognised as not being sufficiently robust. That Department also has a role to play in ascertaining how we integrate the green economy into the current investment strategy and any future investment strategy. DSD has responsibilities with fuel poverty and social housing. The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development has a role to play in biomass and energy efficiency in the rural sector, and the Department for Regional Development has a role to play in transport and energy efficiency.

Finally, the Department of the Environment (DOE) has a role to play in planning and climate change responsibilities. Indeed, I am glad that the Minister of the Environment has joined us for the grand finale. Therefore, a collective effort is required from the Government. It is important that an overarching strategy emerges and, in particular, that that is reflected in a future Programme for Government.

The debate has been encouraging. We welcome the proposals from the Green New Deal Group. This is a platform on which we can build, and I look forward to that happening. I am happy to support the motion and the amendment.

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

Main Question, as amended, put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly notes the benefits that can be achieved through implementing the green new deal in Northern Ireland; supports the need for improved energy efficiency to reduce fuel use and meet European Union and United Kingdom carbon emissions targets; believes there is a real opportunity to create 30,000 sustainable green-collar jobs; and calls on the Executive to implement a cross-departmental strategy to ensure that the potential benefits of the green economy are realised for Northern Ireland.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Members to switch off their mobile phones, as they are interfering with the sound system.

2.30 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Environment

Environmental Crime

1. **Mr McGlone** asked the Minister of the Environment what resources he plans to give to address environmental crime in the next year, particularly in relation to the illegal disposal of tyres, which is a major source of pollution when dumped in the countryside or burnt on bonfires. (AQO 209/11)

The Minister of the Environment (Mr Poots):

I am committed to maintaining and enhancing my Department's capability to address and combat the full range of environmental crime that it enforces. Over the next few months, the proposed recruitment of additional staff to the environmental crime unit is expected to take place, further strengthening our ability to tackle the scourge of waste crime, including illegal tyre disposal. Clearly, the economic climate means that all departmental resources are under review, and until the details of the next comprehensive spending review are known, I remain cautious. However, I will ensure that tackling environmental crime will remain a top priority for the Department over the next year and beyond.

The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) is developing a range of policy and legislative tools to make its work more efficient and effective, from PSNI-level training and additional Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 powers to undertake financial investigation of criminal assets to the forthcoming Waste and Contaminated Land (Amendment) Bill and fly-tipping protocol. I am confident that the message that we have been striving to publicise over the past few years about the risk posed by burning tyres is being heard and acted on. There have been some high-profile examples of large-scale tyre fires in recent months, but my officials have been working hard behind the scenes to encourage the legitimate disposal of tyres through licensed dealers and to prevent further fires.

When education and encouragement fail, officers in the NIEA environmental crime unit can, and

do, take enforcement action. The environmental crime unit has investigated and prosecuted a number of cases, including the illegal disposal and burning of tyres. The most recent conviction was secured in Newry on 20 September.

Mr McGlone: I thank the Minister for his answer. Does he agree that it is wrong to allow tyre depots to collect money for the safe disposal of tyres without any procedures, guidance or enforcement measures in place to ensure that tyres are disposed of safely and in an environmentally friendly way? At a recent meeting of the Committee for the Environment, it seemed that some of the Minister's officials were not necessarily aware of methods for evidence gathering and how best to liaise with the PSNI to gather evidence so that people involved in disposing of and burning tyres illicitly can be prosecuted for the environmental crime that they have committed.

The Minister of the Environment: I understand that it is an ongoing issue. We are constantly looking at how we can improve work on that front. Large scale fires, particularly the one that took place just outside Londonderry, have drawn the public's attention to the weaknesses that exist. We are certainly aware of those weaknesses; we are seeking to ensure that we can deal with them and have a more affirmative, robust means of dealing with them.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answer. He is well aware that the Committee is considering the Waste and Contaminated Land (Amendment) Bill. Does he intend to introduce a clause to address the issue, or does he believe that the new protocols will address it?

The Minister of the Environment: We are looking at the protocols in conjunction with everything else in relation to how we tackle the issue. We think that there are methods that can help. However, that is what legislation is about, and if the Committee, or Members, think that areas can be strengthened, we will be happy to consider amendments. If something will improve the Bill, we will be happy to support it.

Mr Kinahan: Is the Minister aware that approximately one third of all used tyres disappear, often making a profit for somebody, and not necessarily the people who are dealing with them legally?

The Minister of the Environment: Yes, we are aware that many tyres for which people pay money to be disposed of correctly are not disposed of correctly. That is an issue of concern, and one that we wish to pursue.

Local Government: Legal Costs

2. **Dr McDonnell** asked the Minister of the Environment what discussions he has had with the local government auditor in relation to the possible misuse of ratepayers' money by local councils in the settlement of legal cases brought against them. (AQO 210/11)

The Minister of the Environment: I have not had any discussions with the Chief Local Government Auditor on that matter, and it would have been inappropriate for me to have done so in connection with any specific case. Local government auditors are designated staff at the Northern Ireland Audit Office, and they act independently of my Department in carrying out their audit functions on district councils. The role of the Chief Local Government Auditor is to audit the accounts of councils and take appropriate action when any irregularity is found. I am confident that he has been, and will continue to be, meticulous in fulfilling that role.

Dr McDonnell: Does the Minister agree that there have been scandals involving some local councils, which put bad behaviour and bigoted practice before good practice and left the ratepayers to pick up the legal costs? Does he also agree that spending money in that way must end? Does he have any ideas about how to bring some control to local councils?

The Minister of the Environment: Yes, I am aware of such practice. Newry and Mourne District Council, for example, was reprimanded for demonstrating bigoted behaviour in not allowing the public to use its facilities. I appreciate the Member's bringing to the attention of the House the misdemeanours of that council on that occasion. However, I am sure that it has learned from that.

Mr Craig: I declare an interest as Chairperson of the Audit Committee. I thank the Minister for his initial answer. Had he given any other response, I would have rapped his knuckles. Does the Minister agree that the use of public funds by any council to take legal cases against another council cannot be justified and should be the subject of an audit report?

The Minister of the Environment: That is a matter for the Chief Local Government Auditor. If the Member has concerns, he should draw them to his attention. In all such matters, councils should seek to resolve their differences through the normal channels without proceeding to legal mechanisms.

Mr Gardiner: I declare an interest as a member of Craigavon Borough Council. Does the Minister agree that the failure to finalise the reorganisation of local councils under RPA meant that some councils appointed temporary members of their staff to the senior management team, which might result in legal disputes and a cost to ratepayers?

The Minister of the Environment: I do not want to get into the internal affairs of any particular council. That is neither my role nor my responsibility. However, the Member should be aware — if he is not, I will make him so — that councils can legitimately employ people now. There is no ban on the recruitment of senior officers. It may not suit some councils to do that, as they may achieve better value for money through how they do things now. I do not know, and I have not investigated any of those cases because that is not my role.

George Best Belfast City Airport: Flight Times

3. **Ms Purvis** asked the Minister of the Environment to provide a definition of a “special circumstance” which would allow a flight to take place at the George Best Belfast City Airport outside the 21.30 time limit set out in the planning agreement; and what measures he is taking to enforce the terms of the planning agreement. (AQO 211/11)

The Minister of the Environment: The 2008 planning agreement makes provision for delayed scheduled flights during extended hours — between 9.31 pm and 11.59 pm — in exceptional circumstances. However, that phrase has not been further defined.

The report of the examination, which was held in public in 2006 to review the planning agreement, noted that a definition of the phrase “exceptional circumstances” that was acceptable to all interested parties was unlikely to be attainable. However, although the phrase is difficult to define, we take the view that its inclusion highlights the need to keep delayed air

traffic movements (ATMs) after 9.30 pm to an absolute minimum. That said, my Department recently wrote to the airport seeking information about the reason for the delayed flights and how the airport considers that those meet the terms of “exceptional circumstances”.

Ms Purvis: I thank the Minister for his answer. Will he answer the second part of the question and tell the House what measures he is taking to enforce the terms of the planning agreement to protect the public interest, given that his Department, which has powers of enforcement for legislation, has not enforced the agreement on the seats-for-sale limit?

The Minister of the Environment: With regard to the exceptional circumstances, everything is up for consideration because there was no agreement on what that term meant. Last year, of 39,328 flights, 360 — 0.92% — came in between 9.31 pm and 11.59 pm. One per cent may be regarded as exceptional by some but not by others. It is a relatively small proportion of the number of flights, and, given the nature of airlines, flights out of London and all other factors, there has to be some latitude. Less than 1% is not a significant enough figure for us to become involved.

Mr Beggs: Does the Minister acknowledge the fact that Belfast City Airport is one of only four airports in the EU that is designated a “city airport”? Does he also acknowledge the fact that a European directive enables higher environmental standards to be applied to such airports? What higher environmental standards have been applied to Belfast City Airport?

The Minister of the Environment: The airport has to operate within certain zones. The standards applied to it are that it operates only between 6.30 am and 9.30 pm, and there is a limit on the number of flights at 48,000 per annum. Those are fairly significant limitations on the airport.

A flight regularly goes over my home after 12.00 midnight on its way to Belfast International Airport, which I can hear clearly. Therefore, I understand where many people are coming from on such issues. I am particularly sympathetic to the views of the people in east Belfast who live closest to Belfast City Airport. However, as with all things, there must be a balance. If Mr Beggs is suggesting that we be punitive with Belfast City Airport, seek to ensure that it is not a good business model and, as a consequence, ensure that business is driven out of Northern Ireland and

a time of recession, that is not somewhere that I intend to go, and I will not take that route with him.

Mr McDevitt: Does the Minister accept that 326 flights a year equates to a late flight every day — with the exception of weekends — at the airport? Does he also accept that that should amount to an exceptional breach of the licence? What steps will he take to enforce the terms of the licence?

The Minister of the Environment: If there are 100 flights a day and one flight is late, that may not be deemed wildly significant. I encourage the Member and the whole House to keep their rationale. There is an issue, particularly for the people in east Belfast, whom Ms Purvis represents.

Mr McDevitt: It is also an issue for people in south Belfast.

The Minister of the Environment: I have considerably less sympathy for the people of south Belfast, because I happen to live under a flight route for Belfast City Airport and Belfast International Airport. I know what it is like to have a lot of air traffic over my home, whether that is in the morning or at night, and it does not particularly perturb me.

In east Belfast, the planes are flying really low for landing, so I can fully understand where Ms Purvis's constituents are coming from. Therefore, we will try to achieve a balance. The restrictions to limit flights at 48,000 and operating hours to between 6.30 am and 9.30 pm will remain in place. We have no intention of removing them. I can give that assurance to the local community of east Belfast.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question 4 has been withdrawn.

2.45 pm

Single Waste Authority

5. **Mr McLaughlin** asked the Minister of the Environment how many of the 26 local councils objected to or supported his Department's proposal for a single waste authority. (AQO 213/11)

The Minister of the Environment: In April 2009, my Department consulted on the need for, and timing of, a single waste disposal authority for Northern Ireland. Some 14 councils responded directly to the Department. Of those,

two opposed the Department's proposal and one supported it. The remaining 11 councils suggested amendments to the Department's legislative proposal.

The three waste management groups that carry out waste management functions on behalf of their constituent councils also responded to the consultation. The North West Region Waste Management Group, which comprises seven councils, commented that its constituent councils did not believe that there was any need for a single waste authority in Northern Ireland once current procurement exercises had been completed. The Southern Waste Management Partnership, SWaMP 2008, which comprises eight councils, suggested that the Department's proposals should be developed for one or more waste disposal authorities. It also stated that its members were adamant that there should be no single waste disposal authority, although one of SWaMP 2008's constituent councils had previously expressed support for the Department's proposal. The response from arc21, which comprises 11 councils, suggested that the Department should legislate for discretionary powers that would enable groups of councils to voluntarily establish a waste disposal authority on a subregional basis.

Mr McLaughlin: I thank the Minister for his full and detailed reply. Will he give us a similar analysis of the responses of the 26 councils to the proposal for a single business organisation?

The Minister of the Environment: That is a wholly different and separate question, and I will give the Member an answer in writing. There seem to be Members of the House and members of local government who are afraid of change that will bring about real savings. The Members opposite would do well to see how they can devise real savings, because, at a time when there will be greater austerity, their actions will lead to job losses in the community. They are not prepared to make difficult decisions that will bring real savings that can then be passed on to the public through lower rates and taxes or better services. I would prefer to deliver better services and lower rates, unlike the Members opposite.

Mr Givan: The Minister has alluded to my point already. Given that the councils that make up SWaMP 2008 were opposed to a single waste authority and that, at the Strategic Leadership Board, Sinn Féin stated explicitly that it was

opposed to a single waste authority, how were we to derive the financial benefits to justify moving ahead with the review of public administration?

The Minister of the Environment: The problem with the review of public administration was that we needed to spend £118 million to achieve it. The additional savings were to come from doing things like developing a single services organisation for waste and corporate services for councils. That was clearly rejected. Sinn Féin was opposed to those difficult decisions, so when the savings were taken away, we were left with the option of amalgamating councils, which was going to cost the taxpayer money. That made no logical sense to anyone. I suspect it does not even make sense to Sinn Féin, but nonetheless, that is the line that it took.

Mr Armstrong: What savings have been shown to be possible through the establishment of a single waste authority?

The Minister of the Environment: Work is being done to identify the savings that can be made. I have received a note from SWaMP 2008 asking if it can delay its response on that matter until 18 October. Work is coming to a conclusion on that front, and I hope that we can identify the tangible savings that could be made and should be made and which are of benefit to the wider public but which some people do not want to make.

Local Government: Waste Management and Recycling

6. **Mr W Clarke** asked the Minister of the Environment which local councils are currently not meeting their targets in relation to waste management and recycling. (AQO 214/11)

13. **Lord Browne** asked the Minister of the Environment what steps his Department is taking to ensure that local councils meet their Northern Ireland Landfill Allowance Scheme targets for the recycling of household waste. (AQO 221/11)

The Minister of the Environment: With your permission, Mr Speaker, I propose to answer questions 6 and 13 together.

According to the latest available published data, all district councils met their Northern Ireland landfill allowance scheme (NILAS) targets in 2008-09. Recycling targets apply to Northern

Ireland as a whole but do not apply at local council level. With the household recycling rate in 2008-09 standing at 34.4%, Northern Ireland is also on track to meet the waste management strategy recycling target of 35% by 2010.

The Department has implemented a range of interventions to meet the targets. Those include the £200 million of funding that has been allocated to the strategic waste infrastructure programme; £5 million for the Rethink Waste capital fund; £1 million annual funding for the waste and resources action programme; and £200,000 for the Rethink Waste revenue fund and the revision of guidance and advice to local councils on their responsibilities under NILAS.

Mr W Clarke: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his response. What I am trying to get is an assurance that councils that do not reach or exceed their targets will not be penalised through regional fines. That is a worry for councils. Moreover, what incentives will the Minister give to councils to exceed their targets?

The Minister of the Environment: We recently introduced the Rethink Waste capital fund, for which we identified £5 million of funding, and that programme has seen significant uptake by local authorities. The first element of the programme was announced a few weeks ago, and we will be in a position to announce the next portions of grants in the very near future. That money will be spent before this financial year is out. Local government has the funding. It recognises that it needs to recycle, and, by and large, local councils are stepping up to the plate.

Given that we reached a household recycling rate of 34.4% in 2008-09, I am confident that we will well exceed the 35% target by 2010, so the imposition of fines on any council will not be an issue. Albeit, the Member makes a fair point: some councils need to do more, and we will continue to encourage those councils to do more. The fact that many of the figures are in the public domain creates a league of shame for councils at the bottom of the table. I would not want to be a member of the Strabane or Belfast councils at the bottom of the table. I would much prefer to be a member of the Antrim or Banbridge councils at the top of the table.

Mr Cree: I was interested to hear the Minister's comments. He is quite right. What conclusions can be drawn from the variation in recycling figures among the different local authorities

in Northern Ireland? Is there any method of waste collection that produces higher recycling results?

The Minister of the Environment: Some councils have simply taken the bull by the horns, so to speak, and decided that recycling is the way to go. They are to be commended.

As for means of recycling, some councils use kerbie boxes, and the quality of the recycling material is generally better and has a higher end value. However, it is easier for the general public to use mixed recycling schemes, which are still quite successful. The North West Region Waste Management Group suggests mixing five different materials in its bins, and that is for that group to determine. I do not know which is the best way or the perfect way to recycle. All that I can do is encourage councils to continue to work on it.

I said before that I believe that not only can we meet the 50% recycling target by 2020, we can exceed it. If that is the case, perhaps we can drive down the costs of the infrastructure fund that is required for energy recovery, and instead of having to spend £200 million of capital from central government and £400 million from local government, we can drive down those costs by recycling more.

Mrs D Kelly: Will the Minister outline any discussions that he has had with the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment about businesses that could be established in the recycling market? Obviously, one incentive is that there has to be an endgame for recycled materials.

The Minister of the Environment: I think that one of the key companies is actually in the Member's constituency. Cherry Polymers is in Annaghmore, which is, I think, just about in her constituency. Huhtamaki is in the Member's constituency; it supplies 50% of the egg boxes used in the United Kingdom and recycles a huge amount of paper. There is also Quinn Glass, which recycles glass. A lot of materials that are selected for recycling in Northern Ireland are recycled in Northern Ireland. Let me dispel the myth that there are no organisations recycling materials in Northern Ireland and that it is all being shipped off to China. Much of it is being dealt with here.

I have recently visited companies involved in recycling building waste: McKinstry Skip Hire

and Wright Recycling. They are moving towards 95% recycling of building materials. Much good work is being done at a local level, not just in the public sector but in the private sector.

Planning Applications: Charges

7. **Ms S Ramsey** asked the Minister of the Environment if there is a cap on the amount that Planning Service charges for commercial planning applications. (AQO 215/11)

The Minister of the Environment: The Planning (Fees) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010 came into force on 4 October 2010. The general effect of the regulations will be to increase fees by approximately 2.9%. The fee payable for an application for industrial, commercial, community and other buildings, other than dwelling houses or buildings covered by category 3 in the schedule to the regulations, is £237 where no floor space is created, or £237 for every 75 sq m subject to a maximum of £11,834.

Ms S Ramsey: Go raibh maith agat. We have been talking about social economy and kick-starting the economy. Does the Minister's Department have any plans to reduce those fees for community-based projects?

The Minister of the Environment: We are looking at fees. Members regularly complain to me about the loss of planning officers as a result of the downturn. It is believed that we could raise an additional £2 million to £4 million by amending the planning fees.

Before any Member gets into a blind panic, what we are looking at are things like the North/South interconnector; a few thousand pounds was paid for that planning fee. The planning fee for the bridge over the River Foyle was some £237, yet I recently spoke to a farmer who paid almost £10,000 to lodge a planning application for a farmyard. If someone wanted to build 1,000 houses, the maximum fee would be just over £11,000. All in all, the planning fees that we have are not fit for purpose. They need to be amended; that is in the public interest. Those proposals will be coming before the House in the not too distant future.

Mr Gallagher: Is the Minister's Department considering linking genuine job creation potential to an appropriate reduction in the planning fees for commercial applications?

The Minister of the Environment: When we look at those regulations, the Floor will be open to Members' suggestions. One suggestion to help economic development is charging for the pre-application discussion scheme. That may be something that we make available to smaller applicants as well, so that people get good advice from the Planning Service prior to lodging an application, the result being that they get a quicker decision and spend less money identifying the right solution for their particular need.

Mr Campbell: The Minister has just mentioned a review of charges for planning applications. Will his Department bear in mind a sense of proportionality so that small applications will entail a smaller price and larger applications will have a price that is, not horrendous, but at least relative to the commercial propriety of the application?

The Minister of the Environment: The direction we intend to take would be to remove planning applications from some of those smaller projects. We are looking at removing the need for planning approval for porches and single-story extensions and things like that, and simply using the building control exercise to ensure that everything is done to a proper quality. A lot of planning applications are not necessary, and we want to weed a lot of them out.

3.00 pm

Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Electricity Interconnector

1. **Ms Lo** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what progress has been made on the extension of the North/South electricity interconnector. (AQO 224/11)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mrs Foster): As highlighted in the recently published strategic energy framework, investment in and the strengthening of the electricity network is absolutely essential. The new North/South interconnector is a key element of that. NIE applied for planning approval in December 2009 for the Northern Ireland section of the new interconnector. To ensure that public concerns are considered

fully, my colleague Minister Poots wrote to the Planning Appeals Commission to request a public local inquiry. Further progress on that very important strategic project is dependent on the outcome of that inquiry.

Ms Lo: I thank the Minister for her reply. It is a very good project that will probably benefit all consumers, north and south of the border. We very much support the project. Why did the planning application for the interconnector have to be resubmitted?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The planning application in respect of the Northern Ireland section was not resubmitted, but the planning application in the Republic of Ireland had to be withdrawn. It may not yet have been resubmitted, but there were certainly some technical difficulties. However, the planning application for the Northern Ireland section of the interconnector is still live.

Mr Craig: I know that there has been a bit of controversy about underground and overground cabling. As an engineer, I know that risks are associated with both. There are huge risks with putting it underground. That would have immense cost implications. Will the Minister outline what those may be?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: There has certainly been a very big debate about whether to have overground or underground cabling. As energy Minister, my duty is to ensure that the consumers have access to a reliable electricity supply and that the line will burden electricity customers in Northern Ireland only with costs that are strictly necessary. I am sure that the whole House wants me to ensure that consumers do not receive increased bills because of unnecessary burdens.

NIE published a report by PB Power that compared the cost of the cable options. It indicated that, on 2009 prices, building the line overhead could cost some £760,000 a mile, compared with an estimated cost of £5.6 million a mile for an underground line. I know that those who are campaigning for an underground line for the interconnector dispute those figures and say that there is too much of a differential. However, there always will be a differential between an underground and overground line. We have to consider that very carefully because, as I said, I will burden consumers here only with what is strictly necessary.

Mr Kinahan: I thank the Minister for her answer. We all know that the grid in Northern Ireland needs to be reinforced to take additional loads from renewable energy sources, but has that demand been factored into the costs of the interconnector? Who will pay the costs involved?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: That is part of the work that we are doing at the moment in the strategic energy framework. We are setting out very clearly the costs going forward, part of which will be the capital expenditure in respect of the interconnector. Of course, we cannot settle that until we know the situation regarding underground or overground cabling. I will resist making the Wombles remark again, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The Minister will be aware from a previous Adjournment debate of the very real concerns that people who live along the route of the interconnector from Moy to Meath have in relation to health, visual and environmental impacts and the tourism industry.

I welcome the Environment Minister's decision to hold a public inquiry into the application. The Minister has said that, on figures from NIE —

Mr Deputy Speaker: A question, Mr Bradley; ask a question.

Mr D Bradley: If you give me the opportunity, I will ask the question.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I have given you the opportunity to ask the question, Mr Bradley.

Mr D Bradley: Bhuel, seo í an cheist mar sin.

The Minister said that the figures she received from NIE show overheading to be the cheaper option. Will she take into consideration the other studies that she mentioned, which show that, over a longer period, undergrounding works out cheaper.

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: We await the translation of that bit in the middle of the question, Mr Deputy Speaker. We are not clear what was said. However, as I have clearly said, significant technical issues and costs are associated with placing high-voltage electricity cables underground. I hear what the Member has to say in relation to public concerns about environmental and health issues. I hear those

messages very clearly, and he knows that I have met people along the route. The line must and will meet current safety standards. I hope that all those concerns will be addressed in the public inquiry.

Ms J McCann: What is the Minister's view on the proposed sale of parts of NIE to the Electricity Supply Board (ESB) and of any potential investment that would come from that sale?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: My concerns about the proposed acquisition of NIE by ESB are well documented. In early summer, I had discussions with ESB and the Republic's Energy Minister at that time, principally to talk about the importance of maintaining existing NIE jobs, of NIE continuing to operate as a separate entity in Northern Ireland and to seek assurances that there would be local representation on any ESB board.

The transaction between NIE and ESB is entirely a commercial matter between two private companies. I have received assurances from both a commercial and a departmental perspective. However, I have to say that I remained uncomfortable at a political level in respect of the matter, and I spoke to the First Minister about it. After that, as the Member will be aware, a joint letter was issued by the First Minister and the then leader of the Ulster Unionist Party. It is a commercial decision that lies outside of government. However, the UK Office of Fair Trading is still scrutinising the proposed transaction, and, as I said on 7 July, I continue to keep a close watch on the situation.

Gas (Applications for Licences and Extensions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1996

2. **Mr Cree** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline the result of the recent consultation on the amendment to the Gas (Application for Licences and Extensions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1996. (AQO 225/11)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The public consultation ended on 7 September 2010 and seven submissions were received. No objections were raised. All respondents were broadly content and agreed that the proposed amendments were necessary to ensure compliance with the EU services

directive. A decision note on the outcome of the consultation is available on the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) website. The regulations came into effect on 30 September 2010.

Mr Cree: I thank the Minister for her reply. Will she explain why there was such a delay in promoting the legislation that it breached the 21-day rule, despite the EU services directive being dated 2006?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The Department breached the 21-day rule to avoid infraction procedures. The Member will ask why it was not brought in before that. I will explain. The possible need for an amendment to the Gas (Applications for Licences and Extensions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1996 to remove the requirement for a company applying for a gas licence to provide a point of contact in Northern Ireland for the duration of the application process was initially raised by the Utility Regulator in autumn last year. The Department sought legal advice on the issue from the Departmental Solicitor's Office, which indicated that the gas regulations were, arguably, already compliant and did not require a company to be established in Northern Ireland for that purpose. Based on that advice, work on the amendment was not taken forward.

However, at a later stage, the UK Department for Business, Innovation and Skills insisted that the change be made, and we moved quickly to do so. I recognise the Member's frustration, but the decision was based on the fact that we believed that we were already covered in that respect. The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills is the ultimate arbiter on European matters, and it insisted that we make the change. I thank members of the Committee for working with me in that regard.

Ms M Anderson: Go raibh míle maith agat. Is the Minister aware of the widespread concern that gas may not become an available energy option in the north-west due to the failure to extend the licence to build a network there?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The Member will know that, in general, I am in favour of rolling out the natural gas network not just to the north-west but across Northern Ireland. Recently, I received the results of a study commissioned by the Department and the Utility Regulator into the technical and economic feasibility of extending

the natural gas network to not only the north-west but to the generic west of Northern Ireland. The results are extremely interesting, and they will be used by DETI and the Utility Regulator to consider how best to take forward new gas infrastructure to areas with sufficient gas loads and to where large infrastructure investments of that nature are deemed to be economically viable. It is also hugely important to consider the views of the gas industry on any gas network extension and on the whole area of mutualisation, which needs to be taken forward as well.

Mr S Anderson: What is being done to create more competition in areas that are currently held and operated by Firmus Energy?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: We are looking at opening up the areas operated by Firmus Energy to competition, but we need to look at the pricing implications of that on companies that are currently with Firmus Energy. Furthermore, as I said in relation to electricity prices, I must ensure at all times that both domestic and business consumers get the best value for money.

EU State Aid

3. **Dr Farry** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the impact of the anticipated changes in EU state aid rules. (AQO 226/11)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The European Commission has still to indicate how it wants to change the state aid rules after 2013, so it is not possible to assess the impact of any changes now. We expect the European Commission to start consulting with member states later this year or early in 2011. Of course, I will make the case for the best deal for the Northern Ireland economy.

Dr Farry: I thank the Minister for her answer. In light of the inevitability of some changes, what contingency plans have the Minister's Department and Invest Northern Ireland put in place to ensure that resources can be redeployed to other areas in order to support the local economy?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: As the Member will be aware, the matter was raised in the independent review of economic policy, which stated that the impending state aid rule closure post-2013 means that we should be moving towards

innovation and research and development. That is still the view. However, following the review, I took the view that I need selective financial assistance (SFA) as a tool in my box when I am trying to get investors to come to Northern Ireland. I still hold that view. SFA is a useful tool; indeed, some of the investments that we have been able to secure recently have been based on the fact that we can give quite generous amounts of SFA. I know that next year the percentage of SFA available will drop considerably, but I will be arguing that, given the recessionary period in which we have been, we will need to continue to have SFA post-2013.

Mr A Maginness: I thank the Minister for her reply. I ask the Minister to make strenuous efforts to retain financial assistance for businesses in Northern Ireland, because, hopefully, we are moving out of recession. When we move out of recession, we will need every assistance that we can get. If we do not make the strongest possible case to the European Commission, we will be bereft of that tool to which the Minister referred. I hope that she will do that.

3.15 pm

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:

I agree with the Member, and we will make the strongest possible case to Europe in respect of SFA. As was stated in a recent independent review by Ernst and Young, Northern Ireland has become second only to London as an attractive place for foreign direct investment (FDI). I want to be able to continue with that, and Members will know that part of that is about rebuilding, which we are currently doing, and another part is about rebalancing the Northern Ireland economy. The Finance Minister and I are currently working with the Treasury on a paper that Her Majesty's Government will bring forward on rebalancing the economy. We will wait to see what comes forward in that on corporation tax, research and development grants or tax credits, and training credits or tax relief. If SFA is to slowly go away, we will need to look to other mechanisms to get stand-out for this region to ensure that we continue to get the sort of FDI that came to Northern Ireland on Friday and Monday of this week.

West Belfast and Greater Shankill Task Forces

4. **Mr Adams** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline her commitment

to the full implementation of the West Belfast and Greater Shankill Task Force, in light of the deprivation index published in May 2010. (AQO 227/11)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:

Considerable progress has been made against the issues that were identified in the task force's 2002 report. Some £20 million was allocated for projects that are specific to west Belfast and the greater Shankill, and 16 out of the 17 of those projects have been or are in the process of being implemented. Those include a £7 million education initiative to address educational under-attainment in the area and a pilot social economy fund, which aims to provide an opportunity of work experience and personal development in a social enterprise environment. I have also issued a draft Executive paper outlining options on the way forward for the task force initiative, and I await a response from colleagues, which will allow the issue to be discussed by the Executive.

Mr Adams: Go raibh maith agat. Tá mé buíoch den Aire. I thank the Minister for her answer.

The Minister will recall that, before the summer, she and I had a positive discussion about the realignment of the task force under the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM). In May 2010, the deprivation index located six out of the 10 areas of most social deprivation in the Shankill and west Belfast.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Ask a question, Mr Adams, please.

Mr Adams: Does the Minister agree that there is now an urgent need for a renewed commitment by the Executive to refresh and implement fully the task force report?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:

As I indicated to Mr Adams at that meeting, I had put forward a draft Executive paper in 2009. That paper details a number of options for taking the initiative forward, one of which is to transfer responsibility for the initiative to OFMDFM. When the paper comes to the Executive, it will be a matter for the Executive to decide.

Mr Campbell: Does the Minister agree that that project, worthwhile as it is, is probably symptomatic of many problems in working class areas across Northern Ireland? Does she agree

that the Executive and the Assembly probably need to examine more closely areas of high deprivation and unemployment where there are people without hope for the future and to try to identify mechanisms whereby we can bring hope for the future to them, not only for the present generation but for future generations in areas where unemployment has been endemic for many years?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and

Investment: I am hopeful that, when the paper comes to the Executive, looking at the wider issues surrounding generational unemployment will be exactly the sort of conversation that we will have. Although we continue to bring high-value jobs to Northern Ireland, I am not blind to the fact that the unemployment statistics for Northern Ireland keep rising. Therefore, there is a fundamental difficulty, and it is a difficulty about which I have been having discussions with the Minister for Employment and Learning and at which Invest Northern Ireland has been looking carefully to try to think of imaginative ideas, including the involvement of social economy partners, to deal with generational problems of unemployment and with people who are finding it more and more difficult to find work in these difficult times.

Mrs D Kelly: I welcome the fact that the Minister will look at that on a much wider basis than just west Belfast, although I understand its particular need, given the number of wards of deprivation in the area.

Did I hear the Minister correctly when she said that the paper has been with the Executive since 2009? Does she have any idea whether it has been discussed in the Executive? What is the hold-up in bringing it forward?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and

Investment: I am simply waiting for the matter to come on the agenda. I am also waiting for outstanding comments from a number of Departments: the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety; OFMDFM; and one other Department, the name of which I cannot think of at the moment. However, I am keen to have a discussion around the Executive table to try to take matters forward, not only in west Belfast but, as the Member for East Londonderry Mr Campbell indicated, in other areas where there is great deprivation.

Banking: Businesses

5. **Mr McElduff** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline any discussions her Department has had with local banks in relation to the problems faced by the business sector in the current economic downturn. (AQO 228/11)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and

Investment: Last year, I initiated a series of meetings with the main local banks to discuss their contribution to helping Northern Ireland companies weather the recession and, in particular, how greater use could be made of the UK Government's enterprise finance guarantee scheme. Since then, my officials and I, in liaison with the Minister of Finance and Personnel and his officials, have maintained regular contact with the banks and ensured that specific problems raised by businesses and, indeed, their political representatives have been brought to the banks' attention. I intend to hold further meetings with the banks this autumn.

Mr McElduff: I thank the Minister for her answer and for her ongoing efforts. Has she read the damning critique of local banks by our Church leaders, who have spoken collectively of the despair faced by small business owners at this time of economic downturn? How can we bring maximum pressure to bear on local banks so that they adopt a more flexible and caring approach to the business sector at this time?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and

Investment: I am certainly aware of the very real issues that were raised. I welcome the fact that Church leaders were given an opportunity to raise those issues before a Committee and make known the sorts of pressures that they are dealing with among their parishioners and flocks.

Having spoken to me about individual businesses, the Member knows that we have very few tools with which to make the banks deal with businesses in a certain way. I have said in the House many times that, when we go to them, the banks tell us that they are lending, open for business and want to do business. However, people come to our constituency offices, across Northern Ireland, to tell us that they are coming under pressure because of overdraft limits and renewal fees, and because the banks will not support them with their bills for Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs and other agencies. Therefore, there is a disconnect, and that is

something that we will continue to try to deal with. I have already indicated to officials that, following my recent discussions with people from the social economy sector, I want to speak to the banks again. There is a need to renew those contacts.

Mr I McCrea: I welcome the Minister's commitment to keeping the pressure on the banks as much as she can during this difficult time. Another major part of the problem is how jobs are dealt with. Will the Minister detail the work that Invest NI has been doing to try to safeguard and create jobs?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: It is important that businesses have knowledge of what is available to them. At the beginning of the recession, I asked Invest NI to be more forward-facing with clients, as well as with non-clients. We produced on the website nibusinessinfo.co.uk a table of the support that is available to small and medium-sized businesses and we have worked with councils and local chambers of commerce. We also had the short-term aid scheme, which we launched to allow companies to retain specific skills so that, when the upturn comes, those skills will be ready and available.

We also provided the accelerated support fund, which allowed businesses to avail themselves of free diagnostics of their difficulties, and we established that fund to try to work with those businesses. Therefore, I hope that Members acknowledge that Invest Northern Ireland has been working alongside businesses during the recession and has been trying to assist them in whatever way it can.

Mr Savage: Does the Minister support the Treasury document 'Financing a private sector recovery'? Is she satisfied that the Irish banks operating in Northern Ireland can compete with other banks that are under separate control?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: I have often said that part of our difficulty in Northern Ireland is that we do not have our own banks. Two of the banks are Irish owned. The Ulster Bank is really a subsidiary of the Royal Bank of Scotland, and the Northern Bank has Danish headquarters. Part of the difficulty, therefore, is that we are not the masters of our destiny when it comes to our local banks. The Republic of Ireland's economy is facing huge difficulties at this point in time, and I said recently that we do not live in a

vacuum and that we in Northern Ireland will feel the cold wind of those difficulties. Part of that will probably be connected to the two Irish banks.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle; thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. The Minister mentioned what seems to be the two planes of reality that exist: first, what we are being told in our constituency offices about overdraft and renewal fees, and secondly, what the banks seem to be saying about those fees. I think that it is a misnomer to call them local banks, because that is the last thing that they are. They may be situated locally, but they mainly have overseas owners. Therefore, at the Minister's next meeting with the banks, will she add one other item to that list and ask them to ease up a wee bit on lending to first-time buyers? That is a major issue and obstacle, and it must be addressed to help to regenerate and support the construction industry at this time.

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Part of the difficulty is that, five years ago, people were able to access mortgages for somewhere in the region of 120% of the value of their house. That is because the pendulum had swung so far in one direction. That was a hugely dangerous way to go. When I was a conveyancing solicitor, I remember wondering why people would not buy a house if they were getting a 120% mortgage. We are now in a situation where young people and, indeed, first-time buyers of every age, are finding it hugely difficult to get any sort of a mortgage. I absolutely sympathise with them. However, that is a consequence of and a direct reaction to what happened before. Nevertheless, I am certainly happy to raise that issue with the banks.

Northern Ireland Tourist Board

6. **Mr Givan** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of whether the Northern Ireland Tourist Board is the most efficient body to promote tourism. (AQO 229/11)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The draft tourism strategy, which I will be taking to the Executive shortly, sets out my vision for the tourism sector up to 2020. It includes some ambitious targets for visitor numbers and spend. The strategy sets out clear roles and responsibilities for the organisations and bodies that are involved in delivering for tourism so that fragmentation

across the sector can be addressed and efficiency, therefore, increased.

The Northern Ireland Tourist Board will have a critical role to play in the delivery of the strategy. It will build on the recent success of its award-winning marketing campaign to attract visitors from the Republic of Ireland, and it will build on the work that it is doing to deliver the five signature projects.

Mr Givan: At a time when we are facing austere measures, does the Minister agree that the Executive should be looking fundamentally at all quangos and non-departmental public bodies, including the Northern Ireland Tourist Board, that could be amalgamated or brought back into the Department if that were a step that could deliver efficiency while still driving forward delivery? Does she agree that that measure should be given serious consideration?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Every Minister should be looking seriously at all the matters that the Member raised. Some of the boards in question are quite heavily populated and have 12 to 15 members. Therefore, we need to ask ourselves whether those boards are fit for purpose and whether we need such big boards. I know that the coalition Government have indicated that they are looking at a long list of quangos.

Indeed, there has been press speculation about VisitBritain, which is the equivalent of the Northern Ireland Tourist Board. The issue is being looked at nationally, and it would be remiss of us not to do the same here in Northern Ireland.

3.30 pm

Motion made:

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

Adjournment

Brontë Homeland Interpretive Centre

Mr Deputy Speaker: The proposer of the topic for debate will have 15 minutes in which to speak. All other Members who wish to speak will have approximately six minutes.

Mr McCallister: I hope that that is not a sign that everybody is leaving the Chamber. It is good to see colleagues from the South Down constituency here. Margaret Ritchie and P J Bradley are at a function in Dublin and apologise for their absence. I declare an interest as I live in the Brontë homeland area. Various sites around the original Brontë homestead are on the tourist trail and close to where I live. Those include Glascar church, where Patrick Brontë taught school and Alice McClory's cottage, where Patrick Brontë's mother lived. It is a beautiful part of the south Down countryside.

The Brontë homeland is an undervalued part of Northern Ireland's rich cultural heritage. Sometimes, we are defined here by our cultural and historical divisions. In fact, our part of south Down and the history of the Brontë homelands have made a huge contribution to English literature, and the whole family background has had a massive cultural impact throughout these islands and across the English-speaking world.

There are several things that we need to do to promote the area. We need to find out whether we can attract more visitors to the area to make businesses there more viable. We must also ensure that we promote the Brontë homeland area, so that when tourists come to Northern Ireland they do not stay in Belfast. Tours should be organised to bring people to the area, not only to the Brontë homeland but to the other attractions in south Down and beyond, whether that is retail at the Outlet in Banbridge, the history of the linen trail at the Irish Linen Centre and Lisburn Museum or the Mourne Mountains and Newcastle. The Tourist Board must think along those lines and ensure that we build on

the numbers who travel beyond Belfast to visit the area and enjoy that type of heritage.

The facilities are in place, and, with modest investment, we could build on what we have and ensure that people know about the connection with the Brontë heritage. We must also look at how we link in with Brontë country in Yorkshire. I am interested to hear what the Minister has to say about whether we can do anything on an east-west basis to promote those links and ensure that people know where the Brontë story began. Most Members will agree that we have not always been brilliant at promotion. We were not always great at ensuring that people knew, for example, that the Titanic was built in Northern Ireland. We must do better with Brontë country, and the best way to promote that is on an east-west basis.

Given the east-west links, I am somewhat sceptical as to whether Tourism Ireland provides the best mechanism for robustly promoting the Brontë trail. However, I would like much more to be done to promote the two areas and to ensure that people know about the links with Northern Ireland. We need the Northern Ireland Tourist Board and Tourism Ireland to campaign to bring visitors to the area and to tell them that it is here that the Brontë story began. We need them to point out the sites of interest and the places that people would like to visit. Think of the impact that the Brontë sisters' writing has had across the world; there is huge interest in them. We must tap into that if we are serious about promoting our tourism sector.

On numerous occasions in the House, the Minister has spoken about the importance of tourism and how it is a key growth area for our economy. We have signature tourism projects here, among which are the Mournes and St Patrick projects. Brontë country is very close to the areas covered by those projects, and I want to see how they can work together to increase the number of visitors.

With modest investment, we could make a real difference. For example, we could promote tours from Belfast to Brontë country to let people experience the culture, heritage and background of this extraordinary family story and see where it began. That is something that we must do to promote the area. It is such an undervalued asset. One of the biggest criticisms of us, as a society, is that we are not good at blowing our own trumpet about the marvellous tourist

facilities, history and scenery that we have. We must do that much better if we are to promote tourism here. We have only to look at the number of people who visit Northern Ireland to see that.

We need to sell Brontë country in the various parts of our domestic market throughout the United Kingdom and across English-speaking areas of the world, such as the USA and Canada. We need to promote the area as a must-see for visitors who want to enjoy the rich cultural background and literary genius of the three Brontë sisters. That is why I was so keen to secure the debate today. I am passionate about the Brontë homeland not just because I live there, get to see it every day and know the beauty of the countryside and the richness of the heritage but because I want to ensure that the Brontë homeland is promoted and shouted about so that others hear about it, visit it and enjoy what we have to offer in that part of south Down.

I am grateful to other colleagues from the South Down constituency for attending the debate. I also thank Mrs Kelly, who is a Member for Upper Bann, for filling in for her party colleagues. Some of Brontë country is close to the Upper Bann constituency, and some Brontë stuff is in the FE McWilliam Centre on the edge of Banbridge. There are connections between the two constituencies, and the history of linen in the area could also be tied in. Those are the things that we need to build on.

I look forward to the Minister's response to see how we can improve the number of visitors to the site and how we can make it more viable. The more visitors we can attract to the Brontë country, the more viable we make it for small rural businesses in the area, whether craft shops or cafes, to tap into that market. Those small businesses cannot survive without people visiting the area, enjoying their experience and spending some of their hard-earned money when they are there. We need to encourage that.

We have an excellent resource, so let us build on it and promote it. We need to steadily build up the number of visitors to help the economy of that part of south Down and help everyone enjoy the rich experience of our heritage and our beautiful landscape.

Mr Wells: I support the Member for South Down Mr McCallister in his comments about the Brontë homeland drive. I am glad that he has managed to attract no fewer than eight MLAs to the debate, including you, Mr Deputy

Speaker. I have the unenviable record of having attracted the smallest number to any debate at Stormont ever. Present in the Chamber on the late evening of my last Adjournment debate on the Ballynahinch bypass were the Speaker, the Minister, who was Mr Robinson —

Mr McCallister: I hope that this debate is rather more successful than the one on the Ballynahinch bypass. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Wells: Yes, indeed.

Present were the Minister, the Speaker, P J Bradley and me. I had to write a press release for the 'Down Recorder' and the 'Mourne Observer' but, as only four people had been present, I did not know what I was going to write. I then thought up what I thought was a very good headline: Mr Wells speaking to a hushed Assembly. That reflected the tiny numbers that were present.

Mr McCallister is absolutely right: the world does not end at Carryduff. We in south Down and parts further away from the centre of Northern Ireland's population face the problem mentality that, once you get past Carryduff and head towards Ballynahinch, things change and all civilisation ends. That is not the case. The Brontë homeland drive is one of the hidden gems of Northern Ireland's tourist potential. We are fortunate that a parish church became vacant. It has been sympathetically converted into the Brontë interpretive centre, where people can go to enjoy and read about the great contribution that the three sisters made to the literary heritage of Britain and the United Kingdom.

There is an interesting parallel here. If you asked most people on the streets of London where the Titanic was built, they would say Southampton, and they would be totally wrong. If you asked most people where the Brontë sisters' literary inspiration came from, they would say Yorkshire, and they would be wrong. In fact, the sisters grew up and learnt so much of their writing skills in the middle of County Down. We need to sell that asset. Literally millions of people throughout the world are connoisseurs of Brontë literature, but we seem to do so little to market that wonderful potential.

There is also a clear and direct link between the Brontë homeland drive and the Mourne signature project. More could be done to market Brontë through the Mourne signature project. Members who know the geography of south Down will know that the two are linked. Some

of the large amount of resources that are quite rightly poured into the Mournes should spill over into Brontë. We could have a wonderful combination of the rugged scenery of the Mournes and the gentler, undulating drumlin country of the Brontë homeland drive and try to encourage people to go to both.

There is still so much to be done to propagate the east-west link. Far too much of the talk about tourism on the island of Ireland is "North/Southerly". I note, for instance, that several SDLP Members are abroad in Dublin today and cannot be here to contribute to the debate. We need to reinforce the east-west links, because there is far more that links us, as a community, with our compatriots in Scotland, Wales and, particularly, northern England than with the more remote parts of the Irish Republic. I would like to see money put into some form of joint project. Why can the Minister not get together with our colleagues in Yorkshire and have some joint thing and encourage the thousands, if not millions, of people who regularly visit Brontë country in Yorkshire to move the few miles across the Channel to County Down, where they will be made extremely welcome?

People do not get the complete picture of what stimulated the Brontë family to become the leading authors that they were until they understand both the Yorkshire link and the Rathfriland link. Those folk are missing out, so the potential is absolutely enormous. Tourism is the world's largest industry. It is heavily dependent on manpower and requires a large number of employees. Tourism offers us a chance to get out of the recession through the increased employment opportunities that it brings. Therefore, why not take the Brontë country, which is one of our hidden gems, and market it to the hilt? We could be very pleasantly surprised by the way in which we could tap into the huge interest in the wonderful works of three incredible sisters who did so much to promote English literature.

3.45 pm

Ms Ruane: Bhuel, go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Mar Chomhalta Tionóil do thoghcheantar Dhún Theas, cuirim fáilte roimh an deis seo le plé a dhéanamh ar chur chun cinn Ionad Léirithe Cheantar Bronte. As an Assembly Member for South Down, I welcome the opportunity to discuss the promotion of the Brontë Homeland Interpretive Centre, and I

thank the Member for bringing the issue to the Floor today.

County Down is a beautiful part of Ireland. It is steeped in culture and history. The towns and villages of the Mourne are exciting destinations in their own right and are good bases for discovering the beautiful mountains of Mourne and our spectacular coastline. County Down is synonymous with music, poetry, dance and literature. Patrick Brontë, the father of Charlotte, Emily and Anne, was born into a County Down farming family on St Patrick's Day, 1777. Ireland is renowned all over the world for our literary talent and literary figures, such as Joyce, Beckett, Seamus Heaney, John McGahern and Maire McEntee, and the island of Ireland is also known for the Brontë sisters. I agree with the Members who said that we need to celebrate our literary giants.

It is fitting that we celebrate those amazing, strong women. It is good to see that there were so many women writers during that time. I would hazard a guess that they were quite feminist women and very creative. I also agree with the Members on the development of tourism, and I agree with Jim Wells that things do not stop at Carryduff. They do not, and, unfortunately, in the past, there was insufficient investment in south Down and in other areas outside Belfast. However, thankfully, we are starting to redress that imbalance.

Where I disagree with Jim Wells is that it is not just men who are involved in the tourist industry. There are many women in it as well. Tourism is very important for men and women. The tourist industry can be a key driver of job creation throughout south Down, in the Mourne and along our beautiful coastline. We need to maximise those outstanding assets, particularly in areas that have traditionally been neglected and ignored. We need to develop our accommodation sector. Anyone who works in the tourism sector understands the importance of spend, and the biggest part of spend is overnight spend. There is no point in just bussing tourists into south Down for the day to have a bite of lunch and then leave. That is no good. We need to ensure that they have overnight stays. For that to happen, we need to develop a proper tourism infrastructure, including B&Bs, hostels and hotel accommodation. When Newry and other parts of the North of Ireland got new hotels, it was the making of them.

The Brontë homeland is one of a number of unique assets that we have, and, if properly promoted, it can attract new visitors to the area. That requires a more coherent marketing strategy, integrated with other local attractions and events, which is properly resourced and funded by the Tourist Board and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment. Iarraim ar an Aire Fiontar, Trádála agus Infheistíochta straitéis aonair margaíochta turasóireachta a fhorbairt le ceantar dheisceart an Dúin agus na contaetha atá in aice leis ar an dá thaobh den teorainn a chur chun cinn. Ba choir go mbeadh ceantar Brontë, chomh maith leis na háiteanna eile mórspéise, ina ngnéithe tábhachtacha den straitéis seo.

I urge the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to develop a single tourism marketing strategy for the promotion of south Down and neighbouring counties north and south of the border. It is important that we develop our natural hinterlands, which are south of the border. There is a huge market for us south of the border, and it is a bit worrying when representatives from my constituency say that they do not want to develop the North/South aspect. We need to develop the North/South aspect and the British-Irish aspect. We want visitors from all parts of this island and from England, Scotland, Wales and further afield. What we need to do is to develop trails. Every year, thousands of people from all over the world come to Newgrange, and we need to ensure that their buses do not turn around at Newgrange and go back to hotels in Dublin. The Assembly must ensure that the Mourne area is opened up from Newgrange onwards by developing the cultural tourism potential of Newcastle, Ballynahinch and all the coastal towns such as Ardglass, Killough and Ballyhornan, in a way that befits the area's beautiful coastline. I urge the Minister to support that very good initiative. I thank the Member who brought the topic to the Assembly.

Mrs D Kelly: I am sure that the Minister, who is a Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone, will be concerned to learn that the world ends at Carryduff. If South Down is in difficulties, God knows what will happen to Fermanagh and South Tyrone.

I am grateful to the Member for bringing the topic to the Chamber. Upper Bann has an interest in the establishment and promotion of the tourism trade connected to the Brontë homeland. I want

to place on record our gratitude to Banbridge District Council and, indeed, to Newry and Mourne District Council. They have taken the initiative and invested heavily over the years to establish the interpretive trail and to promote the Brontë homeland when there was absence of investment from elsewhere.

Few young girls and, I am sure, few young men who are students of English literature do not know the stories of 'Jane Eyre' and 'Wuthering Heights', among others. Those stories have had considerable impact on many of us who have gone on to enjoy reading. There is merit in making the story of the Brontës and, indeed, their novels more alive through linking up with the Minister of Education to promote visits to the interpretive centre and other locations through the curriculum.

The Member for South Down Ms Ruane is right to say that the Brontës were ahead of their time. In fact, I am beginning to think that she stole some of my lines about feminism. They were leaders in that regard. We are aware of other female authors who had to write under men's names because it was not the done thing for women to write, just as it is more difficult for women in many aspects of life today, such as politics. It is refreshing that the Minister is present for the debate, representing women in as a difficult a field as writing was many years ago.

Many Members have made valid points about tourism potential. That has been well articulated. I am sure that the Minister is au fait with all of that. There are examples of good practice elsewhere. Ms Ruane referred to James Joyce in particular. We are all aware of people who follow in the footsteps of Joyce's characters, hold celebratory dinners and even an American club that celebrates Joyce on a particular night of the year. Of course, if one looks east-west, one sees how Rabbin Burns's legacy is promoted in Scotland. Therefore, Northern Ireland could adopt lessons from elsewhere. Of course, love of literature could be promoted as a career option in creative industries, as well as for its tourism potential. That could be done through the school curriculum.

Other Members have referred to how well poets, authors, writers and artists in general have lit up difficult times and enriched ordinary people's lives. They include the poets of the enlightenment, such as AE Russell, who was born in Lurgan; the Brontës; the many Great

War poets, who wrote eloquently about the non-glamorous side of war and conflict; and our poet laureate Seamus Heaney. Therefore, there is much to be commended about seeking a career that will enable someone to fulfil their life's ambitions and to make some money while enriching other people's lives, which, at times, are difficult.

We hear much about doom and gloom and about many families' concerns about how they will pay their bills at the end of each week. They wonder what 20 October will bring with regard to cuts. It is right and proper that we not only invest in our literary talent but use it as a model for fulfilment across a wide range of industries and education. I join other Members in urging the Minister and the Tourist Board to step up a gear in relation to the promotion of the Brontë interpretative trail.

Mr McCarthy: I am grateful for the opportunity to say a few words on this important subject. Much has already been said, so I will not repeat it. I thank John McCallister for securing the debate and bringing it to the Floor. Anything that advances the good things that come from any part of County Down, whether it is South Down, North Down or Strangford, will have my 100% support.

I must confess that I have not had the pleasure of visiting the Brontë interpretative centre, but I have no doubt that it is a first-class facility with the potential to contribute significantly to the economic development of that area in County Down. Northern Ireland has an abundance of interesting people and places, and today we acknowledge the contribution to society of the Brontë family. I am grateful to Library staff for presenting me with two or three pages of history on the family. I did not have that knowledge before, but I am equipped with it now.

It is only right and proper that our generation should promote the Brontë sisters and their family from the fair county of Down. I pay tribute to the local authorities. I understand that Banbridge District Council had the foresight to put the talents of the Brontë family on public display. As I understand it, the Brontë sisters were born in Yorkshire, but I could be wrong. They may have spent some time in County Down; I am not sure whether they did, but that can be clarified. I understand that their parents came from the tiny village of Drumballyroney. Let me get my head around that one, because, as

Members will know, I am an ardent supporter of the promotion and preservation of townland names. Drumballyroney is a new one to me. It is a beautiful name, and I am sure that there is, in fact, history connected to it, its meaning and its origin. The name of the homeland is interesting in itself.

Patrick Brontë was born in the townland of Drumballyroney, as was his mother before him. Their ancient homes and haunts are part of the homeland tour, which nestles in the foot of the Mourne. The Brontë homeland trust has done a wonderful job on the upkeep of the sites. I commend everyone involved in the Brontë promotion and wish them every success.

The Minister is not a County Down woman; she is a Fermanagh woman. I will promote County Down from one end to the other. There are excellent facilities from Bangor, through Ards to south Down and, I must say, Mr Wells, beyond Carryduff. County Down is a wonderful county with many attractions. One that springs to mind is the Betsy Gray story, which should be told. It starts halfway between Bangor and Newtownards. It is a wonderful story that is connected to the rebellion of 1978, I think it was, and all that went on there. Some people say that it is only a story, but it is worth pursuing. In my role as an Ards borough councillor, I have tried on numerous occasions to join with North Down Borough Council to get that story on to the map, but it is not there yet. I plug that to the Minister in her role as Minister for tourism. Perhaps, somewhere along the line, it will come across her desk. It must be a joint initiative by the councils. Mr deputy mayor, I look forward, I hope, to visiting the Brontë homeland in the not too distant future.

Mr Deputy Speaker: This deputy mayor is not aware of any rebellion in 1978.

4.00 pm

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mrs Foster): I congratulate the Member who secured the Adjournment debate. It is good that the Ulster Unionist Party is promoting strong feminist women, and they have done that today with the Brontë sisters. Of course, the tragedy of the Brontë sisters is that none of them lived past their mid-40s, all dying relatively young, but they left a huge mark on the literary scene in the British Isles. It is right that we mark the fact that their father came from this area.

I will briefly set the context for my comments. The new draft tourism strategy sets out our new targets for the tourism industry. At present, the average daily spend per visitor in Northern Ireland is just £37, compared with an average of £62.50 in the Republic of Ireland and £65 in England. Therefore, we need more product for people to spend their money on, which means giving more product of a different nature. Culturally, our products are sometimes lacking, and I welcome additional cultural products being brought forward. However, the tourism industry is not immune from the economic challenges that we face, and we must clearly identify our priorities for tourism. We have done that through the signature projects, which many Members have already mentioned. People become worried when their area of Northern Ireland is not neatly fitted into those signature projects, but south Down is fortunate, because it benefits from the St Patrick signature project and the Mourne signature project. We want to tie the Brontë homeland into those signature projects and the wider scene to maximise it for visitors.

I recognise Mr McCallister's point about the east-west connection. Patrick Brontë left south Down and went to Yorkshire, where he set up home with his family. I want to endorse that east-west link for cultural tourism, because there is potential for a strong arts and cultural link. I want to explore that; indeed, we have been exploring such links with other literary names.

Northern Ireland has produced or has connections with some of the world's greatest authors, playwrights and poets, and those connections give us a real opportunity to create and deliver unique tourism experiences for visitors who are interested in immersing themselves in the landscapes and places that influenced those artists. One of my favourite authors is C.S. Lewis, and the Mourne provided the inspiration for Narnia. We should certainly try to make more of that C.S. Lewis link. It is not simply an east Belfast link; it is also linked to the Mourne.

It was the farmland of County Down that Patrick Brontë — the father of Charlotte, Emily and Anne — left. He was born into a farming family there on 17 March — that is why he was called Patrick — in 1777. When people visit the Brontë homeland, they can follow the story of Patrick Brontë and his family through the buildings that survive, including the little church and school where he taught and preached. Patrick's birthplace at Alice McClory's — his mother's — cottage

at Emdale is still there at Brontë Road, as is Glascar school, where Patrick taught in the 1790s.

The interpretive centre is operated by Banbridge District Council, which promotes the centre through its website and promotional leaflets. The centre is also promoted through the Brontë homeland bus tour. The Northern Ireland Tourist Board promotes the Brontë Homeland Interpretive Centre as part of its 'Great Days Out for Groups' guide, an initiative designed to showcase a variety of days-out experiences available in Northern Ireland for group visits and the group market. That publication contains over 100 themed day-visit itineraries tailored to such groups. There are two such themed days in the brochure. The first is named "Saints and Scholars", which is the stronger of the two, if Members do not mind me saying so. I know that Mr McCallister mentioned the Brontë homeland and the home of discounted designer shopping. There is something not quite right about placing literary giants such as the Brontë sisters with the home of discounted shopping. However, each to its own, as they say.

Mr McCallister: I was trying to facilitate all ladies, not just literary ones but those who like always to look their best.

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:

Thank you very much, Mr McCallister. However, the stronger proposition is the "Saints and Scholars" day, which gives an opportunity to discover connections to famous artists and authors and to learn about St Patrick.

Disappointingly, the Brontë Homeland Interpretive Centre has had only 15 group visits so far this year, resulting in approximately 328 visitors. I would certainly like the Tourist Board to work closely with Banbridge Tourist Information Centre and Banbridge District Council to see whether we can do more to attract visitors. The centre is, of course, listed on websites and in other guides.

I want to mention a forthcoming event, not just because it is in my constituency. As part of a programme in support of our literary heritage, the Tourist Board is in discussions on the development of the Enniskillen international Beckett festival. Samuel Beckett attended school in Enniskillen, and that will be the world's first annual festival devoted to the work of Samuel Beckett and a celebration of his life as a young man. The literary programme at Enniskillen, which starts in July 2012, will

extend into the whole of Northern Ireland. We are thinking of a literary trail starting in Fermanagh with Wilde and Beckett, moving into Down and Brontë and probably up to Londonderry and Seamus Heaney. New and innovative thought is being given to how we can tie all those links together. That is the way to do it, rather than discount designer shopping, although I may be proved wrong. However, we should explore the importance of our literary heritage in delivering a unique tourism experience in Northern Ireland, and the east-west link should be part of that.

Adjourned at 4.08 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 11 October 2010

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Ministerial Statement

Northern Ireland Housing Executive

Mr Speaker: I have received notice from the Minister for Social Development that he wishes to make a statement to the Assembly.

The Minister for Social Development

(Mr Attwood): Mr Speaker, I thank your office for the accommodation that you have shown to me and my Department in making available this opportunity to make a statement to the House. I also acknowledge that my statement was sent a little late, due to a combination of the inability of staff to decipher my handwriting, which is as poor as that of many doctors, and problems with sending the e-mail to all the relevant offices in the Building.

Forty years ago, the social housing sector in Northern Ireland was beset with difficulties. Not only was housing stock substantially deficient physically, housing had become a central issue in the deeply divided politics of the time. There were justifiable concerns about the condition of much of the stock and the substandard, slum conditions that many tenants had to endure. There were also grave concerns about the fairness of housing allocation and decision-making as to where new housing would be located. Housing was administered by a multiplicity of localised authorities, which were sometimes subject to localised political influence.

Housing reform became a central feature of the civil rights debate that raged in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and, in 1971, the British Government introduced a major change. A new comprehensive housing authority, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, was established to take over the duties of 65 housing authorities. The new executive would assume responsibility not only for the social housing sector but for

raising standards in the private and owner-occupied sectors.

The facts speak loud. About 250,000 slum dwellings had been demolished in Britain in the 20 years to 1939. The figure in Northern Ireland was zero. Housing conditions in Northern Ireland, which, in 1900, were broadly similar to those in Britain, had slipped significantly behind by 1939. Improvements took place after the Second World War, and about 180,000 new houses were completed by 1970. However, standards remained lower than in Britain.

The newly formed Housing Executive faced up to that legacy and its 1974 house condition survey painted a stark picture. Almost 90,000 dwellings — 20% — were legally unfit for human habitation, a rate some three times that recorded in England. More than one third of the stock was in need of significant repair, and the problem was especially intense in the private rented sector. Around 26% of dwellings lacked at least one of the five basic amenities, and 22% lacked four or more such amenities. As Members know full well, some 600,000 people in total — 40% of the population — lived in dwellings that were unfit, in disrepair, or lacked certain basic amenities.

Belfast had a disproportionate share of that legacy. In the inner west sector of the city, for example, more than half the stock was unfit, one third had no wash-hand basin, and a similar proportion had no internal toilet. That set a major challenge for the Housing Executive, but history has shown that it was fit for the challenge.

Housing conditions in Northern Ireland have been transformed in the comparatively short space of four decades. The latest housing condition survey shows levels of unfitness of around 2.5% — by far the best in Britain and Northern Ireland — with a tiny margin of

unfitness in the public sector. Over the past 40 years, the Housing Executive has evolved into an organisation with two roles; one as a social housing landlord, and another with housing-related functions, such as the administration of housing benefit and the Supporting People programme.

Forty years into its life, the Housing Executive has functions that are arguably beyond social housing. It faces an uncertain budget situation. There are 19,000 people in housing stress, and waiting lists were down 6% last year. There is a need to build on Margaret Ritchie's achievement of 1,840 new starts last year and my target of 2,000 new starts this year. The time is now right for a fundamental review of the Housing Executive to ensure that it is fit to discharge its housing responsibilities for the next two decades and further into the twenty-first century. Therefore, I have decided to commission such a fundamental review.

The review will examine the housing and other functions of the Housing Executive in detail to provide a comprehensive assessment of its contribution to housing policy objectives, take account of the other structures in the housing policy sector and make recommendations about remit, role and responsibility to achieve best results. The review will also examine the efficiency and effectiveness of the Housing Executive's operations, including the appropriateness of existing structures. It will make recommendations for improving the performance and delivery of housing policy and objectives.

Internal expertise has been sourced to work on the assignment. I will also engage external, independent people with specialist knowledge of organisational reforms of such large public sector organisations to offer sound advice on best practices and optimum value-for-money solutions and to facilitate the completion of key deliverables.

There will be three phases. The first phase will undertake a broad examination of current business and gather evidence to confirm the current base position, including an examination of the strategic and landlord functions. The second phase will identify high-level options for a future service delivery model. The evidence emanating from this phase will be used to develop and underpin a future service delivery model. That phase will be primarily undertaken by the external consultants, supported by internal staff,

and will include stakeholder consultation. Phase three will develop a robust implementation plan for an agreed preferred option.

As Minister, I want to make a number of matters very clear. First, I am strongly convinced that the state should provide social and affordable housing and that it should substantially provide the funds for social and affordable housing. That principle must not, in my view, be compromised. Secondly, I have heard occasionally that there is a magic wand of new, untapped, extravagant sources of moneys for social and affordable housing. To date, those quick fixes have come to nothing.

On the odd occasion, a proposal is made, only for it to be cost prohibitive, resulting in a stock of public housing ending up in private hands or not being operationally or legally feasible or desirable. I hope that that context is understood and acknowledged inside and outside the Chamber.

Whatever the shape of the Housing Executive going forward, housing funding must not be a victim in any Budget outcome. Housing newbuild has not had such a profile for years, and rates for newbuild starts have not been as high at any time in the past dozen years. I shall repeat myself. There were 1,840 new starts last year under Margaret Ritchie, and 2,000 new starts are anticipated this year. There is more housing newbuild on government land. Housing associations with lower grants are borrowing more at low rates from the European Investment Bank and elsewhere, and housing waiting lists are down 6% on last year's figure. That is Margaret Ritchie's legacy. We must build on it, not squander it, and it must be an essential feature of Budget 2011-15.

I believe that Northern Ireland requires much further reform. We do reform well here, and we have done so in areas such as housing, the workplace, policing and politics. Housing has, in many ways, been the trailblazer. Not only has housing fitness been addressed substantially but the politics surrounding housing has been defused substantially. That would have been unimaginable 40 years ago, but we have travelled the road, and we are the better for it. Reforms happen too slowly. Resistance to reforms has been deep, and interests have gathered to frustrate and sideline the impetus to reform. However, I repeat: when reforms happen, we are the better for them. They should

happen more across the range of government and public policy.

Members will be aware of media coverage of a number of matters relating to Housing Executive business that are, or have been, the subject of internal ombudsman or police investigations. Clearly, the various investigations must be allowed to be completed, and due process must not be compromised. Given that context, I believe that it is essential that there is confidence in how the Housing Executive conducts its business, that concerns are addressed fully and robustly and that there are no further grounds for concern. If I am to discharge my responsibilities as Minister and to fulfil my responsibilities to Government and the Assembly and if the permanent secretary is to discharge his accounting responsibilities fully, we all need to be satisfied that the Housing Executive board and governance systems are working effectively and that its operational systems are applied consistently. That is why I ordered a team to be directed to examine and report on a number of Housing Executive matters. That team shall report on whether structures are in place and information is available to the board to ensure that it effectively identifies and manages risk, that it prevents and detects fraud and error, that it holds to account senior managers and that it ensures that the organisation operates at the highest standards of corporate governance. The team will also examine whether adequate controls are used to manage risk, the prevention and detection of fraud and error, as well as performance, procurement and asset disposal, including, where land and property are concerned, the procurement of repairs, maintenance, miscellaneous works and adaptations.

Furthermore, the team will report on whether the organisation has, or can have, access to appropriately skilled and trained staff to allow it to operate in its current form while preparing for and implementing organisational and wider change. It will also report on whether the seven principles of public life are being implemented effectively throughout the organisation. The team will also assess whether there are any other or further grounds for concern. If there are, it will assess how they should be addressed. The aim will be to work through those issues with the board to ensure that they are being addressed. We have asked for the group to report by the end of November.

Members will know that, at the Housing Executive board meeting on 29 September 2010, Paddy McIntyre, the chief executive of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, announced his intention to retire. Paddy began as a trainee with the Northern Ireland Housing Trust in 1969 and moved through the Northern Ireland Housing Executive to become chief executive in 1999. On the day of Paddy's announcement, I said:

"The Housing Executive is one of the great success stories of Northern Ireland over the last four decades. There are thousands and thousands of people for whom housing conditions have been transformed. The Housing Executive has served Northern Ireland well. Paddy McIntyre has been a central figure in the success of the Housing Executive and in changing the housing conditions of so many. I would like to acknowledge his years of service and thank him for his big contribution."

12.15 pm

I know that many in the Chamber have worked with Paddy over the years in addressing the needs of their constituents and constituencies. I suspect that we did not always see eye to eye with him. However, all of those who value what the Housing Executive has achieved should see the value in what I am doing, which is a fundamental review of the position of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive in the longer term, and, in the short term, an audit to ensure that, across its functions and governance, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive continues to go forward.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development (Mr Hamilton):

I thank the Minister for his statement. I will begin almost where he ended. The Committee for Social Development has noted with great concern the recent media reports that the Minister spoke about and recent developments at the Housing Executive, and expresses concern at what is happening in what has hitherto been an organisation that has inspired great confidence. Will the Minister assure the House that, to restore much-needed public confidence in the Housing Executive, his governance audit will involve independent scrutiny? On the issue of the fundamental review, and despite his perhaps sceptical as opposed to my optimistic views on the issue, will the Minister assure me that alternative funding models for social housing in Northern Ireland will, nonetheless, be part of that review?

The Minister for Social Development: In relation to the first point, independence will be built into the audit in two ways. First, the team that has been sent into, and others that will be sent into, the Housing Executive — about which I will comment shortly — will report to a group of people chaired by the permanent secretary of the Department. Not only will that group include people with high-level responsibility and skills within government on the issues that may be addressed in the audit, I insisted, and directed the permanent secretary, that it must include external people, independent of government, the Department and the Housing Executive. A person has been identified who can fulfil that function. That person has particular skills in the accounting, audit and broader sectors and has agreed, in principle, to be part of the permanent secretary's group. The permanent secretary will report to me. If I require access to any of the individuals working with the permanent secretary, including the independent, external experts, I will have that access.

At the same time, the team that is being sent into the Housing Executive comes from the Department and shall come from wider sectors of government, including procurement and audit. I have directed the permanent secretary that there should also be an independent, external element in respect of that work within the Housing Executive as well. Therefore, both within the Housing Executive, there will be independent, external expertise and, within the oversight arrangements, there will be independent, external expertise.

The second point is in respect of the future funding of the Housing Executive. I have spoken to the Committee Chairperson about that matter on a number of occasions, and we differ on where all this might go. Margaret Ritchie will confirm that when she was Minister, and I confirm that in the short time that I have been Minister, various meetings have been held with people who believe that they have the magic wand to fund social and affordable housing in the future. However, we discover that proposals are never worked up in sufficient detail to be credible or viable. Those that come forward are an attempt to take the public stock of 90,000 Housing Executive homes at a low cost and put them in private hands; beyond what we are legally able to do; not desirable in principle; or would recreate the Housing Executive and social housing in the image of the private market. I am not in favour of any or all of that. I will

look exhaustively at any and all forthcoming proposals, but the evidence base to date has not been great enough to convince me, Margaret Ritchie or the Department that there is a magic wand or a quick fix. If there is one, let us hear about it. However, to date, the evidence has not been encouraging.

Ms Ní Chuilín: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his statement. I speak not as the Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development but as my party's spokesperson on social development. We all know about the ongoing PSNI investigation into the Nelson Street site. Will the Minister confirm whether the PSNI has been contacted about recent investigations into the Housing Executive? In addition, how does the Minister intend to address the issue of public confidence in the role of the Housing Executive and, indeed, the Department in dealing with the pressing internal issues?

The Minister for Social Development: I note the Member's question. Last week, during a private briefing to the Committee for Social Development, information was given about cases that are under investigation. In addition, an answer was given to a question that had been tabled for priority written answer by the Member's colleague Mr McCann. I confirm that there are three ongoing police investigations, one recently completed Ombudsman investigation and a number of internal investigations that have yet to be completed, and, therefore, it would be entirely inappropriate for me to anticipate whether they will be referred to a third-party organisation. I will not comment beyond that on any of those matters. They are all under investigation, developing and subject to due process. The matters for which the Housing Executive is responsible for investigating will reach maturity in the near future, when I may be in a position, subject to the conclusion of those investigations, to comment further. However, until then, it would be highly inappropriate for me to comment on them.

I note what the Member said about public confidence in the Housing Executive and the Department. I also note that, last week, her colleague Mr Paul Maskey said that the Department was "in crisis" and that the Housing Executive was "out of control."

As far as I am aware, at no time, whether in private or public session, did any member of the

Committee for Social Development say that the Department was in crisis and that the Housing Executive was out of control. Yet, last week, a member of a party that is represented in the Chamber made that public statement. At no time did any party in the House seek a meeting with me to suggest that the Department was in crisis and that the Housing Executive was out of control. At no time did any party in the House table for debate on the Floor a motion that suggested that the Department was in crisis and that the Housing Executive was out of control. At no time were any Assembly questions tabled that made those claims.

All bodies that deliver public services in Northern Ireland are responsible to a Minister, the Executive and the Assembly. Therefore, if any Member in the Chamber believed that a Department was in crisis and that a body was out of control, there would be an imperative on that Member and his or her party to bring the matter to the attention of the relevant Minister and Committee and the Assembly. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. Allow the Minister to continue.

The Minister for Social Development: Either the Member behaved irresponsibly last week when he made those claims, having never made them before, or he behaved irresponsibly beforehand, because he did not bring the matter to the Assembly's attention. Either way, in my view, it was irresponsible conduct.

Mr Armstrong: Will the Minister detail the cost of the review of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, and will he specify how long the review is intended to take? I presume that he will not be waving a magic wand.

The Minister for Social Development: I did not gather all of that question, Mr Speaker, but I will answer it in the following terms. As I have indicated, the short-term audit will be conducted by an internal Department for Social Development (DSD) and interdepartmental team, which will examine a number of matters relating to the Housing Executive and will be aided in that role by an external person. Obviously, I will share the full details of that person's role and the cost of it with the Assembly in due course. Similarly, the oversight body, which is chaired by the Department's permanent secretary, will comprise internal and interdepartmental personnel as well as an external person, and I will share information

about the costs of that person's services with the Assembly.

As I have indicated, the longer-term fundamental review has three phases. The first phase is a desktop exercise, which will look at all the information, facts and evidence that are available. The second phase will be undertaken by external consultants. A business case has been prepared and submitted to the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) in order to have approval to bring in external consultants in that regard. I will confirm in writing to the Member what the anticipated costs of the external consultants will be. It is my hope and expectation that the first phase, and the wider phase, which will look at the Housing Executive going forward, will result in recommendations being brought to my desk by March next year.

Mrs M Bradley: Is the Minister content that the November date provides adequate time for a report back on the review?

The Minister for Social Development: That is what I have instructed officials; I want to have a report by November. I believe that, given the concerns that have been identified and the context that we are in, in order to scope out how the Housing Executive goes forward in the short term, and to reassure me, the Assembly and the wider public that everything is in order and that those issues that need further attention are being addressed, a short, sharp audit is necessary. That is why I have asked for a November date.

I am shocked when I hear people say that there is a lack of public confidence in the Housing Executive. It manages 90,000 houses, and, over the years, has been responsible for the sale of 120,000 council houses. I do not deny that there are issues, but to draw the conclusion that there is a lack of public confidence in the Housing Executive is exaggerated and extravagant and is not based on the evidence. I base my conclusions on the evidence. Where there are concerns and issues, let us get to the bottom of them, but let us acknowledge successes and strengths.

Ms Lo: It is rather disappointing that Committee members heard about the review when it was announced on the radio by the Minister during an interview on 'Good Morning Ulster'. Would it not have been better for the Minister to have discussed the review's terms of reference with the Committee for Social Development

beforehand, given that it had asked on several occasions about the ongoing investigations into the Housing Executive?

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

The Minister for Social Development: I acknowledge that the Member, and other members of the Committee, had some disappointment. However, I will explain why I believe that the way in which I handled the matter was reasonable and appropriate. First, I am sure that the Member and other Members will confirm that I made it very clear to the Committee that I will make myself available to it whenever the Committee so wishes. Moreover, as Minister, it is my wish that, at least once a term, I be called to the Committee, if it so wishes, to conduct what I would call a stocktaking session — an assessment across the range of DSD functions, in conversation with the Committee.

12.30 pm

Secondly, I would like to think that, by and large, the Committee believes that it is kept in the loop and is properly informed. Given the media interest in all of this, and given that there were further disclosures around investigations in recent days and weeks, my concern was to strike a balance between being decisive and strong in respect of what was required but, at the same time, to not create worst fears around the Housing Executive. I think that the strategy I adopted was appropriate because what I was concerned about is what actually transpired. Whilst I tried to be responsible, balanced and proportionate about difficult, delicate and sensitive matters, other people clearly thought otherwise. It was not me who tried to build upon people's fears and to create worse fears by describing the Housing Executive as "out of control".

I was mindful that people might go down that dead end, and my judgement was that, as Minister, it was my duty to be decisive, to intervene and to set in train the various requirements around the internal audit that I am now conducting but to do so in a way that did not build up anxieties, doubts and a lack of confidence. Given what a Member of this House subsequently did, I think that my approach was the proportionate and balanced one. I regret that I was not in a position to share more upfront with the Committee but, in those terms, that was a proper approach. In any case,

I made sure that, on the morning when I did some media on the matter, at the request of the Committee, my deputy permanent secretary made himself available for a private briefing to the Committee on the ongoing investigations and the nature and character of the work that I had authorised.

Mr Easton: I thank the Minister for his statement and welcome the announcement of a review. Is the Minister able to tell us the timescale for when the review will start and how long it is likely to take? Will the review take into consideration the possible release of Housing Executive assets to go towards new housing and maintenance schemes, in particular for pensioners' bungalows in Bloomfield estate in Bangor, which will now be left for another winter in substandard conditions? Does the Minister not agree that the release of assets now would help with the cuts that will come from the Conservative and Liberal Government in Westminster?

The Minister for Social Development: I thank the Member for his question. The question of the release of assets is relevant across Departments. The Executive and the Assembly will need to consider more fully the issue of the public estate in Northern Ireland and whether assets can be rightly disposed of in a way that protects the public interest rather than through a fire sale as we move forward during the Budget negotiations.

When it comes to the disposal of Housing Executive assets, I am extremely vigilant. The only case where I have considered it appropriate to move in that direction is in relation to a number of properties in Rinmore in Derry, where the tenants in the properties and in the estate generally and all the parties and political representatives agree that it is appropriate for a small number of houses — I think that it is about 60 — to be transferred to a housing association to, to use the Member's language, release assets. That has been done only because of the unanimity among the parties and the political representatives and because of the high level of unanimity, as I understand it, among tenants and residents. Moreover, given that that number of properties require multi-element improvements and that funds are not available for those multi-element improvements, we have a choice between allowing those properties to go into more disrepair or enabling

that small number of properties to be made fit for continued occupation.

That is the only case in my time as Minister where I have seen good evidence and overwhelming support to go in that direction, and I hope that we do go in that direction. So far, that is the beginning and end of the disposal of Housing Executive assets in the way that the Member might have been indicating. As I said earlier, if there are proposals that are consistent with the state's obligation to provide public housing and that, in my view, do not compromise the principle of substantial public funding for social and affordable housing, we should all look at that. However, I would be misleading the House if I were to indicate that I thought that, in the short term or even the longer term, there was a quick answer to that question.

As I indicated to another Member, the timescale for the short-term audit is between now and November and the timescale for the longer-term fundamental strategic review of the Housing Executive is up to next March, when I hope to receive some recommendations. After that, I hope that we will be in a position to make some more fundamental decisions about where the Housing Executive should go.

Mr P Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I have to challenge the Minister on some of his statements on whether I had raised the issue with the Department. If he were to do a bit more research, he would find that I have. As far back as November 2008, I raised the matter with the Audit Office, which then met the Housing Executive and detailed some of the issues that I and some of my constituents in West Belfast had. I posed questions for written answer to the Department on the matter.

Yesterday, I was taken by shock when I heard Margaret Ritchie state on 'The Politics Show' that, in February 2009, she raised issues with regard to investigation. In September 2009, I asked her a question —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. This is questions to the Minister, Mr Maskey. A number of Members are yet to ask questions, and this item of business is time-limited, so please get to the question.

Mr P Maskey: Thank you for that, and I will. I raised the issue with the Minister in September 2009, and her answer was that it was not a

matter for her but for the Housing Executive to deal with. I raised the matter as far back as then, and nothing has been done. Does the Minister have the same concerns that I and a number of his constituents in West Belfast have that work is not being carried out because of the actions of Red Sky and others? Did he have confidence in the then Minister, Margaret Ritchie? Many of my constituents did not, and they are now saying that they do not have confidence in the way that he has handled the inquiry. It is unfair on our constituents in West Belfast, because there is no confidence in the process when people are being shipped out of their offices. My question is: did he have confidence in the then Minister, and did he raise issues with regard to the Housing Executive's contract with Red Sky? If not, why not?

The Minister for Social Development: I note the Member's question. I have no doubt that Members, on behalf of their constituents, have raised questions with various Ministers, including the Minister for Social Development, and with the Housing Executive and others. If Members are not raising questions, they are not doing their job very well, so obviously questions have been raised. *[Interruption.]* I will deal with all of that; I said that questions have no doubt been raised.

Last week, Mr Maskey said that DSD was in crisis and that the Northern Ireland Housing Executive was out of control. There is a big difference between raising questions on behalf of constituents in respect of contracts or procurement and playing on people's fears for political and narrow reasons to suggest that the Housing Executive is out of control and that DSD in crisis. It is not for me to remind Mr Maskey about the role that he plays in the Chamber as Chairperson of the Audit Committee.

My Department has kept the Audit Office informed about what is being done. However, in the event that the matter is investigated further in the House, I wonder whether Mr Maskey will discharge himself from the investigation, given that he has prejudged its outcome by referring to the Housing Executive as "out of control."

Let me repeat these questions: how many times do we debate private Members' motions about issues of concern in Northern Ireland? How many times was Margaret Ritchie called to account, quite rightly, on her duty as housing Minister? How many times did a party in

the Chamber table a motion stating that the Housing Executive was out of control? There was no such motion.

When I appear before the Committee for Social Development, I am rightly challenged and questioned by members from Sinn Féin and the other parties. However, when did the Sinn Féin members of that Committee table a motion on this issue, as they are entitled to do? When did they call on the Committee to conduct an investigation, as they are entitled to do, into the Housing Executive, which they now claim was “out of control”?

I have confidence in the Housing Executive, but that does not give it a licence. That is why I called for a fundamental review and an audit to get to the bottom of each and every matter. Let me say bluntly that I understand why the Member is upset and uncomfortable. In the past couple of months, certain events regarding the responsibility of Ministers from other parties in the Chamber were very close to home.

The profile of housing is higher now than it has been for many years because of Margaret Ritchie's work. There have been more new starts than there were for years and years because of Margaret Ritchie. Time in and time out, she fought a determined, relentless battle against DFP and Executive colleagues to get money for newbuilds and to address housing need in Northern Ireland. She did so from a position of some weakness in the Executive because she was the only SDLP Minister. Do I have confidence in her? It is not a matter of my having confidence in her. It is a matter of the people knowing who brought housing up to its current level, and that person is Margaret Ritchie.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I wish to make a correction for the record, Minister: Mr Maskey is the chairperson of the Public Accounts Committee, not the Audit Committee.

Mr Craig: Thank you for that correction, Mr Deputy Speaker. I declare an interest as the Chairperson of the Audit Committee, so I have also corrected the record for the Minister. *[Interruption.]* I would like that remark to be withdrawn immediately. *[Laughter.]*

Is the Minister aware of any investigations into, or allegations about, the relationship between his Department and the Housing Executive? More importantly, can or will the review, given

that it is being chaired by the permanent secretary, investigate that relationship? That issue also goes to the root of a number of ongoing investigations in the Housing Executive.

The Minister for Social Development: The answer to the Member's first question is no. However, if anybody has reliable information about any public body that concerns relationships, probity, accountability, financial integrity, any other aspect of that public body and, in particular, the five principles that govern the conduct, role and character of public bodies, they should pass that information on, and they may pass it to me if they so wish. Since last week, members of the public have been in contact with me about the issue, and I will refer any and all of their queries to the relevant people in my Department. Any further information about any and all of those matters will come to pass in the fullness of time.

As the Member's second question escapes me, I will have to come back to it.

12.45 pm

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful for the opportunity to ask the Minister questions. I join with him in his tribute to Mr Paddy McIntyre.

My personal view is that the transformation in housing owes more to Margaret Thatcher than Margaret Ritchie.

Does the Minister understand why Members can be slightly sceptical, given that, in recent weeks, the Minister for Regional Development has renationalised Northern Ireland Water, and it now seems that the Minister for Social Development is going to renationalise the Housing Executive? That has all happened in a matter of months and all before the Assembly election.

Have the Minister's colleagues in the Executive seen or approved his statement? Does he accept that the fundamental review is not possible, given that he expressed in his statement a very predetermined outcome that the state should, substantially, provide the funds for social and affordable housing? Finally, when will the Minister's fundamental review begin, given the acknowledged current problems in the Housing Executive?

The Minister for Social Development: I thank the Member for his various questions. As he may be aware, I am obliged to inform the Office of the First Minister and the deputy First

Minister of my intention to make a statement, and it was so informed.

Mr Kennedy: It was not shared with them.

The Minister for Social Development: No, I do not have an obligation to share a statement with Executive colleagues until 11.30 am on the day of making the statement. However, under the requirements of an Executive Minister, I advised the Office of the First Minister and the deputy First Minister that I would be making a statement, and that matter was noted in the report to the Executive meeting last Thursday by junior Minister Robin Newton in respect of forthcoming Executive business. As of this morning, the statement was shared with the Office of the First Minister and the deputy First Minister. All requirements as a Minister and under Standing Orders have been complied with.

If members of the Executive have any comments to make with regard to those matters, so be it. I presume that Executive Ministers are aware that I intend to commence a fundamental review, along with the various media, political and Committee interests over the last few days in respect of the short-term inquiry. So far, no Executive Ministers have raised any comments with me in respect of all of that. Nevertheless, I welcome any comments that they might have.

With regard to the fundamental review; as I said, I hope to have recommendations by March next year. I do not deny that it is a substantial bit of business, and that five or six months is a short time frame. However, as there has been so much public and other commentary about housing need, housing provision, and housing models in the future, a weight of evidence has already been gathered on the shelves of the Department and elsewhere that could quickly inform the Housing Executive's future direction. I do not think that we will recreate the wheel, but there is a lot of good evidence and best practice available that might lead us to conclusions, and if we are not able to do that, I will certainly say so.

I have a very simple view: yes, I have been a Minister for a short time and an election is coming up. I am sure that other parties in the Chamber are much more fixed on that date and outcome than me. I keep saying that I believe that when Ministers go into Government they should also go into power. That has not been demonstrated fully during the first and second mandates. I am determined to prove otherwise in the short time that I am a Minister. I intend

to do further work to reform the North in the next short period. Even with respect to my departmental responsibilities, never mind the fact that we are broadly doing that, there is need for much reform.

I can assure the Member that some of that will not be popular and that there may be some further resistance and unhappiness. The people of Northern Ireland need to know that devolution is not about the mere fact of devolution; it is about delivering for their hopes, ambitions and aspirations. Part and parcel of that will be the reform of a wide range of functions and services in Northern Ireland. Whether that is popular or unpopular, that is where I intend to go.

Mr Gallagher: I thank the Minister for his statement. Given that he has been in office for only a short time, I commend him for the steps that he has taken to intervene and ensure that we can all have confidence in the way that the Housing Executive works.

In his statement, the Minister said:

"housing funding must not be a victim in any Budget outcome."

I am sure that all responsible Members share that view. Will the Minister tell the House what he sees as the immediate priorities in the upcoming Budget?

The Minister for Social Development: I thank the Member for his question. At the Executive awayday in July, there was reference to the need to protect those in need, distress and disadvantage in the Budget outcomes, and there has been reference to that subsequently. That was the right principle then, and it is one that needs even deeper protection and defence as we move forward. The emergency Budget that was put forward by the Chancellor in June has been proven to have had a disproportionate impact on the poor. Some of the short-term, never mind the longer-term, welfare proposals will have a disproportionate impact on the poor, the vulnerable and the disadvantaged.

We are entering into a situation in which, if the figures are correct, we will have increased unemployment until at least the end of 2012, with fewer jobs in the public sector and the shortfall not being taken up by the private sector. There was also information on the radio this morning about some worrying trends in manufacturing output here, unlike other parts

of these islands. Therefore, in the context of us having higher unemployment, potentially less public money with the shortfall not being taken up by the private sector, short-term welfare changes that could impact on those in need and a Budget that has, so far, impacted disproportionately on the poor, ethical values must be front and centre in the upcoming Budget. We must protect and encourage jobs, but we must also recognise the reality that there will be those who will be unable to find work because of their conditions and that there will be others who would like to work but who will be unable to find it. There will be up to 90,000 unemployed people by the time the recession is over in Northern Ireland. Those people must be front and centre when it comes to the Budget. Those who make up the family of front line services, such as nurses, teachers, front line social security staff, Child Maintenance and Enforcement Division (CMED) staff and all those who are concerned with the DSD budget lines, must be protected. I will be arguing that point at the Executive, and I hope that ministerial colleagues will endorse that view.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle, Gabhaim mo bhuíochas leis an Aire as a ráiteas. I thank the Minister for his statement.

I noted that the Minister outlined his criteria to be used before anyone can call a Department in crisis or an agency out of control. Did he share that with his party colleagues, or does that just apply to one particular Department?

The Minister said that he wants the review to end by the end of November, yet a number of investigations are continuing; indeed, we are told that one has lasted over 18 months. How will the outcomes of those investigations impact on his review if the review is over before the investigations finish? The Minister also told the House today that there are a number of internal investigations ongoing. Will he tell us exactly how many there are?

The Minister for Social Development: I thank the Member for his question. At any one time, there will be a whole lot of investigations ongoing in respect of any public body in Northern Ireland. Complaints will be made locally in respect of the activity of some official in a health board, the Housing Executive, the Department of Education or another Department. At any one time, there will be a

large number and a wide range of complaints being made by members of the public, staff, or whoever, in and around the conduct of each and every Department. I am not talking about those categories of complaints. I am talking about the ones that are of more significance and have attracted media comment.

There are three ongoing police investigations; one ombudsman investigation was completed recently; and I understand that there are five internal investigations in respect of a range of matters. I do not intend to share anything with the Assembly beyond what was shared with the Committee, given that these matters are under investigation and due process must be exhausted. As I indicated, my understanding is that a number of the ongoing internal investigations may mature in a short time. Consequently, there may be convergence of the timeline of what I am doing and the conclusion of a number of those investigations, although not the police ones, because those are completely beyond our control.

As I outlined in my statement, the work that I am doing in sending in the team moves beyond the particular cases that are under investigation. That work looks at a range of other matters that have been highlighted by the investigations to some degree but that, in my assessment, require further and independent investigation. The team that I have sent in comprises people who deal with governance issues, audits, risk or suspected fraud and/or who work to build in an anti-fraud culture. A conclusion is required promptly, which is why I have an indicative deadline of November. The immediate work that I am doing is outwith the ongoing investigations but informed by my assessment that various matters in and around the Housing Executive need to be considered further.

In respect of the comment about Northern Ireland Water —

Mr McCartney: I never mentioned Northern Ireland Water.

The Minister for Social Development: I stand corrected, but you did refer to my colleague, and I think that — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order.

The Minister for Social Development: The Member, in a previous intervention from a sedentary position — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr McCartney: Is there a wee bit of guilt there?

The Minister for Social Development: If the Member is not prepared to say what he is talking about, I would just be speculating about what he means; that is not a very clever way to go. I do not take as good example his party colleague's speculation last week about the Department being in crisis and the Housing Executive being out of control. If I will not rely on that sort of speculation, why should I rely on the Member's speculation about whatever it was that he was talking about?

I will say, however, that there are people not too far away from me who, over the last number of weeks, have not only demonstrated that they know what it is to oversee what public bodies do and to get hard information that leads to progress in respect of how public bodies conduct their affairs but who have taken a responsible, balanced, proportionate, well-argued and well-presented approach to the conduct of public life and public affairs in Northern Ireland. They are unlike those who think that the terms "crisis" and "out of control" will somehow get them casual and easy headlines without dealing with the hard truths.

1.00 pm

Mr Deputy Speaker: There are still seven Members who have indicated their wish to ask a question. I remind you that there is only 15 minutes left for questions, so if Members are concise and the Minister is brief in his responses, we may get you all in. If not, some Members will be disappointed.

Mr S Anderson: I thank the Minister for his statement. The Minister touched on the issue of confidence. In his statement, he referred to the seven principles of public life being effectively implemented throughout the organisation. Does he have absolute confidence, from the chief executive of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive downwards, that that is so?

The Minister for Social Development: I thank the Member for his question. I will step back for a moment and say to the Member that it has always been a principle of mine and of SDLP party colleagues to never get into words such as "absolute confidence". In a completely different context — in a different world, thank God — we were forever being asked to

unambiguously support the police, the RUC, as it then was. However, we in the SDLP said that we would support it when it upholds human rights, employs best practice, and is on the right side of the standards necessary for civilianised policing, especially in a divided community. That was the right principle then, and it remains the right principle now.

We never got into language such as "absolute confidence" in any organisation or individual. We always stated the principles and practices that we support. If those principles and practices are employed by any organisation, be it the Housing Executive or any other, we will support that organisation. That remains the case. However, a number of investigations have been ongoing in respect of the police, and, although I have confidence in the Housing Executive, I have asked questions about particular matters, instances and practices. That is the balanced and proportionate approach, and the House can unite around that, rather than getting into the language of absolute confidence. The Member's comments about absolute confidence, and the comments from Sinn Féin in respect of having no confidence, are not the best narrative around a delicate and sensitive matter.

Mr B McCrea: I have waited patiently for my turn to speak. I declare an interest as a member of the Northern Ireland Policing Board. Other people are aware of the media coverage around what is, as the Minister said, a delicate and sensitive matter. The Minister asked for people who had information that they could stand over to bring it to him. With regard to the report that will be made available in November, do you plan to share that information with any other statutory bodies that may have an interest in this delicate and sensitive issue? How and when do you plan to disseminate that information to the Assembly?

The Minister for Social Development: I thank the Member for his question. I do not think that it would be appropriate for me as a Minister to prejudge what will transpire over the next couple of months in advance of any report being made available. I will be kept fully informed and aware of what is going on by the permanent secretary reporting to me and through the panel that will work around him in respect of the audit. However, it would be wrong for me to prejudge what the conclusions might be. It would be equally wrong for me to say, when I do not know what the outcome of an audit might be, who I

will share it with, except that it will be shared as appropriate with people in this Building and outside it where there is good cause so to do.

Mr McDevitt: Will the Minister join me in paying tribute to the many thousands of staff who served the Housing Executive well during the past four decades and, indeed, stood up to the worst excesses of Thatcherite reform and intimidation by IRA and loyalist paramilitaries? Is it the Minister's ambition that, post the fundamental review, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive will, again, become a global pioneer in its provision of social housing to people who most need it in the region?

The Minister for Social Development: I thank the Member for his question and agree with his remarks. The Housing Executive and housing policy in Northern Ireland are pioneering in social housing provision. We can rehearse the rights and wrongs of the decision to allow housing associations to build private social housing. The fact is that that decision was made. During the past 15 years, more than 20,000 houses were built for ownership by housing associations.

The fact that more housing has been built on government-owned land during the past number of years than previously; that housing associations can now access money at low interest rates from the European Investment Bank and others; that, at present, we might consider the one-off proposal for Rinmore; and that more social houses have been built during the past couple of years than at any time during the past 12 years demonstrate that the housing sector — the Housing Executive and housing associations — are breaking new ground and are pioneers.

I am trying to protect the Housing Executive's achievements and legacy and ensure that it has its full range of skills capacity to take forward housing in the next 20 years. If we build on all that has been good and remodel where appropriate in order to maximise progress, the Member's ambitions for housing in the future will be met.

Mr Spratt: I thank the Minister for his statement. I agree that he should not comment on the police investigations. With regard to the review that he announced today, will he assure the House that if issues are raised that may impinge on the police investigations, or if any new criminal investigation is required, the review

team will ensure that that information is brought to police attention immediately?

The Minister for Social Development: I assure the Member categorically that if any matter, however it arises, should be referred to the PSNI for further investigation, it will be.

Mr Savage: I, too, congratulate the Housing Executive on its achievements during the past number of years. It should not let those achievements be marred by investigation. No Department is without investigation. That should not distract it from its main target. Over the years, the Housing Executive has achieved much to improve the standard and stock of social housing. Is it not true that housing associations, too, have played a pivotal role in upgrading housing standards?

The Minister for Social Development: Essentially, I endorse Mr Savage's comments. One reason why I was concerned about how the matter could best be handled and about certain injudicious and political remarks that were made last week was that unnecessary, inappropriate or wrong-headed damage could be done to the Housing Executive. Some people have gone down that dead end. They should reflect on their words and actions. In common with other Members, I affirm the good work of the Housing Executive's staff and its many achievements during the past 40 years. This is a process, in the short term and the longer term, to affirm what is good, to build on what is good, and, where things have not been handled properly, to ensure that we handle them properly going forward.

I concur with the Member's views on the housing associations, but there are issues around them that need to be addressed. There are 33 housing associations, Mr Savage. Is that the right number going forward? How can we further what Margaret Ritchie started as Minister, namely the bringing together of housing associations in procurement groups, not only to procure building contracts, but to procure all their services to ensure that we have better value, efficiency and maintenance of jobs and services? There are a number of other matters in respect of the housing associations that, in the fullness of time, I will return to at Committee.

Mr Molloy: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his statement. Does he agree that an internal investigation, or internal expertise, will not get to the root of the matter? He would never

accept the police investigating themselves, so how does he think that the Housing Executive will investigate itself? The Housing Executive is part of his Department, so how can he oversee it? Will the investigation restore confidence in the Housing Executive?

There are concerns that 30% of the budget for Egan contracts was misappropriated and allocated wrongly. Will that be investigated as part of the internal investigation?

The Minister for Social Development: I note what the Member said. I do not know whether the Member was in the Chamber for all of the statement, but if he reads it —

Mr Molloy: I have it here.

The Minister for Social Development: That is good. You will, therefore, see that this is not strictly the Housing Executive investigating itself. The Housing Executive has referred a number of matters to the police, which is the entirely appropriate thing to do, because those matters gave rise to criminal concerns. The structures in relation to a number of internal matters, so far, require internal investigation. Through working with the Housing Executive board, the chair of the Housing Executive and others, I have been keeping a close eye on those ongoing internal investigations, as is appropriate and to the extent that is reasonable. Remember that one major investigation may be maturing in the near future. Margaret Ritchie, as Social Development Minister, put shape and form around that investigation to ensure that the public concerns around the conduct of various contracts would be seen to be addressed.

I reiterate that we are going back to the use of language about the need to restore confidence. I do not know how many times during the course of this statement Members have raised questions about confidence in the Housing Executive. They singularly failed to do so in any appropriate, structured, disciplined, ongoing, relevant or proportionate way at any time until last week. They will have to answer for themselves in that regard. I have confidence that the Housing Executive has done sterling work over the past 40 years. I have confidence that it continues to earn public and political confidence for much of the work that it does now and continues to deliver for those in housing stress and need and who are on waiting lists. I will not go into the exaggerated and extravagant language that has been used to

suggest that, all of a sudden, the bottom has fallen out of the Housing Executive and how it does its business. I want to maximise the Housing Executive as an organisation going forward, so that it serves people in Northern Ireland as it has done over the past 40 years.

Some matters will give rise to criticism. Let me go back to the ongoing short-term audit. I will comment more about it in a second, but the team that is going in comes from across government and from outside government, and the oversight mechanism of that team comes from across government and from outside government. In that way, we will bring together and gather people with the highest level of skills necessary to conduct whatever assessments need to be made. As I said, they will make assessments on issues of procurement, fraud or suspected fraud, administration, accounting and audit. That will cover all the bases.

1.15 pm

To deepen public confidence, it was I who insisted that departmental and cross-departmental teams would be supplemented by independent, external people in doing the work on the ground in the Housing Executive and in the oversight function. In my view, that is a good model for going forward, and we will see where all that leads. When we see where it leads, I will be in a position to make further assessments about what is appropriate going forward.

I am very cautious about Members getting into the use of further extravagant language such as the term “misappropriation”, which is the word that Mr Molloy used. I am not getting into the use of that sort of language. I will make assessments based on what the team does over the next number of months. That will be informed by my own judgement, by the evidence and by any concerns that stand up. At the same time, when drawing conclusions, I will validate that in the Housing Executive which is fit for purpose and which serves people well. However, I will not hide from any uncomfortable truths, if any are to be found.

Mr Givan: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for Members who have not been in the Chamber for the statement to ask questions about it?

Mr Deputy Speaker: Members who have not been in the Chamber for any part of the statement will not normally be invited to ask a

question. Those Members who have been in the Chamber for part of the statement will be invited to ask a question after those Members who have been present for the entire statement.

Mr Givan: Further to that point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker, will you advise whether all the Members who asked questions were here either for the full statement or part of it?

Mr Deputy Speaker: I confirm that that is the case. Those who were in for the entire statement got to ask questions first, and those who were here for part of the statement got the opportunity to ask a question towards the end.

Executive Committee Business

Unsolicited Services (Trade and Business Directories) Bill: Consideration Stage

Mr Deputy Speaker: I call the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, Mrs Arlene Foster, to move the Consideration Stage of the Unsolicited Services (Trade and Business Directories) Bill.

Moved. — [The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mrs Foster).]

Mr Deputy Speaker: No amendments have been tabled to the Bill. The Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment, Mr Alban Maginness, wishes to speak to clause 1, so we will debate that clause and then put the Question. I then propose, by leave of the Assembly, to group the remaining eight clauses of the Bill for the Question on stand part, followed by the schedule and the long title.

Clause 1 (Control of charges for directory entries)

The Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mr A Maginness): The Committee welcomes the Unsolicited Services (Trade and Business Directories) Bill. We thank the Minister and her officials for their co-operation with the Committee in its consideration of the Bill during Committee Stage.

It is quite a technical Bill that proposes to re-enact, with amendments, certain provisions of the Unsolicited Goods and Services (Northern Ireland) Order 1976 governing the circumstances in which businesses may be charged for publications about them in directories.

The Bill is intended to update the legislation to facilitate electronic commerce by introducing equivalence between paper-based and electronic contracts in directories. The Committee raised some concerns about scams involving electronic systems. However, it was content with the Department's response that the Bill will be prescriptive about informing businesses of every aspect of a transaction before an order is placed.

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mrs Foster): I thank the Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment and the rest of the Committee members for their assistance with the Bill. They gave it careful scrutiny and, in particular, did effective work to ensure that

the consultation was carried out thoroughly and involved representatives of the business community, which the Bill is aimed at protecting. Therefore, I thank the Committee for its work in connection with the Bill.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 1 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Mr Deputy Speaker: No amendments have been tabled to clauses 2 to 9. I propose, by leave of the Assembly, to group those clauses for the question on stand part.

Clauses 2 to 9 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Schedule agreed to.

Long title agreed to.

Mr Deputy Speaker: That concludes the Consideration Stage of the Unsolicited Services (Trade and Business Directories) Bill. The Bill stands referred to the Speaker.

Terrorist Asset-Freezing etc. Bill [HL]: Legislative Consent Motion

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mrs Foster): I beg to move

That this Assembly agrees that the provision in the Terrorist Asset-Freezing etc. Bill [HL] dealing with Northern Ireland credit unions, which is contained in clause 45 of the Bill as introduced in the House of Lords, should be considered by the UK Parliament.

It may be helpful for Members if I recap on some of the background leading to the tabling of the motion and how this particular Great Britain Bill relates to and impacts on Northern Ireland credit unions.

Members will already be aware that my Department is working very closely with Her Majesty's Treasury and the Financial Services Authority (FSA) to implement the recommendations in the February 2009 report from the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment, 'Report on the Committee's Inquiry into the Role and Potential of Credit Unions in Northern Ireland'. The main recommendations of the report, and my Department's policy, focus on the introduction of the appropriate legislative framework to allow credit unions here to expand the range of services that may be available to their members and shareholders as well as the provision of additional protection for shareholders' and savers' assets through the financial services compensation scheme.

A key element of that process will see the regulatory responsibility for credit unions here being transferred from my Department to the Financial Services Authority, or, indeed, its successor, following the conclusion of the coalition Government's review and the consequential restructuring of the current role of the FSA.

In pursuance of the extension of the role of credit unions, my Department, along with Her Majesty's Treasury, recently concluded a joint UK-wide consultation exercise on our proposals for the regulatory reform of credit unions here. We will shortly publish our joint response to the comments and submissions received. However, I am happy to report that the responses were broadly in favour of the measures proposed in the consultation.

Credit unions are an integral part of Northern Ireland society and play an important role,

reaching into the kernel of every community here. For that reason, the process in which we are engaged cannot be hurried through for the sake of expediency. It is important that we get it right and that the FSA is afforded sufficient time to negotiate the various statutory and administrative steps it is required to undertake in advance of assuming full regulatory control, which, it is anticipated, will be completed by the end of 2011.

That process will require the enactment of a number of pieces of legislation, the majority of which will be the responsibility of HM Treasury and will be laid at Westminster. Those include amendments to the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Exemption) Order 2001 to remove the current Northern Ireland credit union exemption as well as the GB Money Laundering Regulations 2007, the provisions of which fully extend to Northern Ireland. Drafts of both pieces of legislation were published in the recent consultation document.

In addition, the introduction of new powers dealing with money laundering, terrorist financing or proliferation involving financial and credit institutions and possible business dealings with persons in a non-European Economic Area into schedule 7 to the GB Counter-Terrorism Act 2008, which extended to Northern Ireland, placed additional enforcement and supervisory responsibilities on my Department. Those measures were aimed at beefing up the Money Laundering Regulations 2007, which were insufficient in addressing issues of international restrictions. That HM Treasury legislation applied to credit unions here equally as in the rest of the UK.

Due to the late tabling of the amendment and the timing of the Bill, at that time, I was unable to follow the appropriate procedure and seek the approval of the Assembly for the inclusion of the provisions relating to Northern Ireland. However, on 24 November 2008, I made a full statement to the House explaining the prevailing circumstances, and the House was generous in accepting the explanation for the position in which I had been placed.

It is now those very same supervisory and enforcement responsibilities, introduced in 2008 in paragraphs 18(1)(d) and 39(2)(d) of schedule 7 to the Counter-Terrorism Act 2008, that are the subject of this motion. These provisions will require to be omitted from a

date in the future, yet to be determined, and ownership will pass to the FSA when it or its successor assumes regulatory responsibility for credit unions here. However, responsibility for credit unions will remain a transferred matter, subject to the will of the Assembly.

The clause to omit these provisions from my Department's area of responsibility is required to be enacted through primary legislation. In keeping with government policy that only amendments relevant to the main Bill are to be included therein, the Terrorist Asset-Freezing etc. Bill [HL] is the only suitable vehicle to carry the clause — clause 45 — that will omit the provisions that currently apply to Northern Ireland within the proposed time frame for the implementation of credit union reforms.

This clause will not be effective immediately but will be commenced by secondary legislation at the appropriate time, when the FSA or its successor is in a position to assume responsibility, upon full implementation of the credit union reforms. The clause will make provision for appropriate arrangements to be put in place and enable a smooth transfer of those responsibilities to the FSA or its successor when required. Therefore, this procedure is purely a technical issue and is a further step towards the ultimate aim of enabling credit unions here to extend their services. I hope that Members will approve the inclusion of clause 45 in the GB Terrorist Asset-Freezing etc. Bill [HL], and I ask for their support for this motion.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mr A Maginness): The Assembly Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment supports the Minister's motion that the Terrorist Asset-Freezing etc. Bill [HL], as introduced to the House of Lords, should be considered by the UK Parliament.

The Minister first wrote to the Committee on 16 September to make known her intentions and reasoning for the motion. The Committee took oral evidence from departmental officials at last week's meeting, to hear the implications of this Bill for Northern Ireland's credit unions. The Committee was satisfied that the Bill would be the most appropriate mechanism to change the relevant provisions in the Counter-Terrorism Act 2008, which prescribes the role of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment as the enforcement/supervisory authority for credit unions in the areas of terrorist financing

and money laundering services. This Bill would transfer those responsibilities to the Financial Services Authority or its successor and is just one of the many legislative requirements to reform credit union legislation in Northern Ireland.

The Committee has been warmly supportive of the process of reforming credit union legislation in Northern Ireland. The Committee has been assured by the Department that this does not have any effect on the transferred status of credit unions in Northern Ireland. The Committee is particularly interested in the credit union movement and is most anxious to see materialise the recommendations of its own report on the inquiry into the role and potential of credit unions in Northern Ireland, specifically the recommendation that credit unions in Northern Ireland should be permitted to expand their range of services to include, at the very least, the services that credit unions in Great Britain can offer.

That recommendation has been supported repeatedly by the Department and the Treasury, and legislation is progressing.

1.30 pm

I warmly welcome the Minister's encouraging remarks about this legislative process. The Committee is supportive of her bid to progress the matter. The Committee is satisfied that progress is being made continually and that this Bill is a necessary step in the process of legislative reform. Therefore, I urge the Assembly to support the Minister's motion.

Mr Irwin: The matter is largely technical. The Committee received a briefing on the proposal last Thursday. I have no difficulty with the requirements referred to, as they will ensure that Northern Ireland is fully compliant with the rest of the UK, particularly with regard to the shift in control of credit unions from the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) to the Financial Services Authority.

I have nothing further to add, and I support the motion.

Ms J McCann: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Following the publication of the inquiry into credit unions, an Assembly debate focused on whether credit unions in the North should have the same powers as their counterparts in the South of Ireland and in Britain. That concept was

supported by all parties. The current economic climate places an extra onus on the Executive to bring forward legislation that will give credit unions the same powers. I hope that that is a step closer.

It is important that we offer all our communities access to those key financial services at an affordable rate, particularly in the present adverse financial conditions. Credit unions are community-based and are open to anyone irrespective of their economic situation or whether they have assets. It is difficult to make day-to-day financial transactions without a bank account, so the restrictions on credit unions' being able to offer a wider range of financial services to meet the changing needs of their customers should be removed.

Hopefully, the added income coming from expanded services could be reinvested in the social economy, for instance, for the benefit of the communities to which the credit unions belong. I hope that this is a step in the right direction, because there is an onus on the Executive to bring forward that legislation as quickly as possible.

Mr Cree: I also welcome the opportunity to speak on the matter given its relevance in today's society. We in Northern Ireland are intimately aware of the threat that terrorism poses, and, therefore, know only too well the focus that these groups place on building sophisticated and complex channels through which to finance their campaigns. Although previously, terrorist groups travelled to the Middle East to pull together funds for their campaigns, things are considerably different in the twenty-first century. With the ability to electronically transfer vast sums of money, it is vital that we have the right financial regulatory systems in place to ensure that any funds that may be used to assist terrorism are quickly and permanently taken out of circulation.

The recent attack in Londonderry is a stark reminder of the threat that terrorist groups still present in Northern Ireland. If we can cut off the financial lifeline to those groups, it will only be a matter of time before they wither and disappear. The motion will ensure that the UK Government have the necessary tools to supervise and freeze any financial assets kept in a credit union by someone suspected of being involved, directly or indirectly, in terrorism. Under the legislative consent motion, functions will be

moved from the Department to the Financial Services Authority as part of wider reform.

Clause 45 of the Bill places a requirement on DETI to relinquish some of its control of the supervision and enforcement of credit unions. It is important to reflect that, although we may be losing this power of self-assessment, the supervisory role will be taken up by a more appropriate body.

It is paramount that we get the right balance between bringing offenders to court and protecting the privacy of the general public who save in credit unions. What discussions has the Minister had with her counterparts on that issue?

Credit unions have played an important role for many people in Northern Ireland since 1960. They have provided a service to the community and allowed for an element of economic autonomy. This legislation allows us to directly target those who seek to finance terrorism. The long-term ambitions of terrorism cannot be realised, and it is the duty of every arm of government to bring about its eventual demise. Accordingly, we welcome and support the motion.

Mr Neeson: The Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment has been dealing with the issue of credit unions for some time. We fully support the extension of the services that credit unions in Northern Ireland will be able to provide. When the powers are transferred to the FSA or its successor, there should be an office here in Northern Ireland. It is important to reinforce that issue. I support the motion.

Lord Browne: I welcome the motion. For some time, access to services and protection has been a major issue for credit unions in Northern Ireland. I know that at least half a dozen credit unions in my constituency will be very glad to see today's motion passed.

Although this is only an early step in the process of allowing credit unions to expand their services, it is, nevertheless, an important one. The process will allow credit unions to provide people with money that they need at a time when banks are increasingly unwilling to lend. Hopefully, it will circumvent the need for people to become involved with loan sharks and other creditors who would aim to exploit them. The process of changing credit unions will benefit businesses also. I am sure that at least a few Members are aware of the EU PROGRESS scheme, which is a micro-finance

initiative that will help organisations such as credit unions. It offers loans of anything up to £21,000 to small businesses. That could be a vital weapon in battling the recession and reversing unemployment. Our credit unions will play a leading role in that regard.

It is one of the ironies of devolution that sometimes the best thing to do is to give up responsibility over something. I have every confidence that this process will lead to a better service for the people and businesses of Northern Ireland. I am also confident that the Terrorist Asset-Freezing etc. Bill [HL], which is currently under consideration in the House of Lords, will receive due attention and swift passage through Parliament.

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and

Investment: I thank all the Members who contributed, particularly the Chairperson for his comments about the legislation. Clause 45 really only came into being in 2008 when it was realised that there was a gap in relation to money laundering in respect of international terrorist organisations that were outside the European Economic Area. As a result of the Committee's desire to allow credit unions to have the same powers and to be regulated in the same way as our colleagues in GB, there is a need for that power to be transferred from the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to the Financial Services Authority, or whatever body replaces it.

We are all very keen for the process to be moved along as quickly as possible. That is what we are doing today: we are laying down yet another building block for those measures to go forward. I noted that Ms McCann said that the Executive need to get on with it and bring forward legislation. However, as I mentioned at the beginning, most of the legislation in respect of this matter will come from Her Majesty's Treasury. We are pushing ahead with this agenda.

The Treasury knows that we are keen to have the matter dealt with as soon as possible. There have been many pieces of correspondence between me and Treasury Ministers, and our officials are in continual contact. I assure the House and Ms McCann, although she is not in her place, that we will continue to push ahead with that matter.

I have enormous sympathy with Mr Neeson about his point that there should be an office of the FSA in Northern Ireland. That view is shared

by every credit union because they will want easy access to their regulator and to the body responsible for the registration function, if we decide to go ahead with that also being sent to the FSA. We will keep pressing the FSA on that matter, and I encourage the Committee to do likewise.

I am happy to bring the motion to the House. It is another building block, and I hope that we are now very well on the road to dealing with the matter.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly agrees that the provision in the Terrorist Asset-Freezing etc. Bill [HL] dealing with Northern Ireland credit unions, which is contained in clause 45 of the Bill as introduced in the House of Lords, should be considered by the UK Parliament.

Committee Business

Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Bill: Extension of Committee Stage

The Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment (Mr Boylan): I beg to move

That, in accordance with Standing Order 33(4), the period referred to in Standing Order 33(2) be extended to 28 January 2011, in relation to the Committee Stage of the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Bill [NIA Bill 31/09].

Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. Tugaim tacaíocht don rún fad a chur leis an Bhille um Chomharsanachtaí Glana agus an Chomhshaol.

There is no shortage of Bills going through Committees at the moment, but the Environment Committee has more than most. The Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Bill is the fourth being scrutinised by the Environment Committee and will be the ninth that the Committee will have scrutinised during this mandate.

The Bill is large and wide ranging, with 76 clauses and four schedules. It covers many diverse areas, from alley-gating and abandoned vehicles to dogs and fly-posting. The Committee is keen to complete its scrutiny before Christmas recess and still aims to do so. However, in light of the Bill's size, the fact that the Committee is also working on three other Bills and the possibility that the Minister may bring a planning reform Bill to the Assembly, the Committee thought that it would be prudent to extend the Committee Stage of this Bill as long as possible into January, while giving the Department the opportunity to complete the Bill's progress in the current mandate. Therefore, I seek support for the motion.

Question put and agreed to:

Resolved:

That, in accordance with Standing Order 33(4), the period referred to in Standing Order 33(2) be extended to 28 January 2011, in relation to the Committee Stage of the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Bill [NIA Bill 31/09].

Standing Committee Membership

Mr Deputy Speaker: As with similar motions, the motion on Standing Committee membership will be treated as a business motion. Therefore, there will be no debate.

Resolved:

That Mr Declan O'Loan replace Ms Margaret Ritchie as a member of the Assembly and Executive Review Committee. — [Mr Burns.]

Private Members' Business

Public Sector Recruitment

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

Mr Campbell: I beg to move

That this Assembly notes the importance of ensuring that public sector recruitment is based on the merit principle; acknowledges that there are still areas of the public sector where under-representation of certain communities appears to be worsening; further notes the ongoing problems associated with recruitment to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive; and calls on the Minister of Finance and Personnel to take further measures to ensure that recruitment in the public sector is more broadly reflective of the working-age population.

1.45 pm

The issue is important, not least because of the size of the public sector in Northern Ireland, and, at this time of supposed austerity and cutbacks, we are only too aware of that. In Northern Ireland, there is very high dependency on the public sector, within which the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) is the largest employer by far. Other public sector bodies, such as the Police, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) are also large employers. Then, of course, we have smaller but no less important public sector organisations such as, to name but a few, the Child Support Agency (CSA), Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC), Waterways Ireland and the Equality Commission.

The motion is about recruitment. To get the message across, I shall use pupil numbers in a school as an analogy. A school might have a healthy number of pupils on its roll, but if, each year, just 10 first formers arrive and 25 sixth formers leave, it does not take a genius to work out that the school will have a problem in the not too distant future. The same principle applies to the public sector workforce. There is not much that one can or would want to do about people retiring at the end of a career in the Civil Service, but there is much that we can

do about the inflow or recruitment of people commencing what they hope will be a long career.

At the start of the Troubles, a case was made that Roman Catholics were being disadvantaged in recruitment. At that time, there was a lack of the kind of regulation that we have now; workforces were not monitored, and there was no Equality Commission to oversee such matters. There was no strict regulation of any kind. Now that organisations, strict monitoring and regulations are in place, disadvantage and under-representation ought to be less likely to occur. However, that is not the case. When there were no regulations, there were accusations of unfair recruitment procedures and an imbalanced workforce. However, now that we have regulations, there are still complaints. I am happy to say that I will keep campaigning for fair play in the public sector.

Turning to an individual instance of unfairness that I have raised on numerous occasions, the general service grades in the Northern Ireland Civil Service form the largest cadre of employment in the largest employee base in Northern Ireland. About 20,000 are employed in general service grades, so, in an area of that size, fair recruitment ratios are very important. However, in recent years, there has been a significant under-representation of Protestants being recruited to that section of the Civil Service. It is also true that there was an under-representation of Roman Catholics in the much smaller Senior Civil Service grades, but that has been improving year on year. Meanwhile, percentages of Protestants in the larger general Civil Service grades are not improving, and I will hammer that point home over and over again until the message is received and understood and action is taken to redress the imbalance. On the one hand, the improved representation of Catholics is to be welcomed, and why would it not be? However, on the other hand, the under-representation of Protestants is worsening, so we need to do something about it.

The 50:50 recruitment policy in the police, which has been raised on innumerable occasions, is unjustifiable and well known, and April next year cannot come quickly enough to end the imbalance, disadvantage and discrimination against members of the Protestant community who apply for a position.

If Roman Catholics were systematically debarred from recruitment to the police or any

other part of the public sector, I can imagine the outcry from the Benches opposite that such practices had to stop. Why are they surprised that there is an outcry from these Benches? It is because those practices must stop. There is not, and was not, systematic discrimination against Roman Catholics; there is systematic discrimination against Protestants in recruitment to the police now. It needs to stop, and next April cannot come quickly enough.

The motion mentions the Northern Ireland Housing Executive; we have raised that issue in the past as well. That organisation brings us to the nub of the motion. Down through the years, and, some might say, through the decades of monitoring fair employment and the different programmes put in place by the Equality Commission — an organisation whose workforce does not represent the wider community and has an under-representation of Protestants — the Housing Executive has been criticised by me and by others for its unfair recruitment basis. It is not about the practice of recruitment, but the basis for it. There has been a significant under-representation of Protestants in the Housing Executive.

As a result of that campaign over many years, the Housing Executive announced in 2003 that it would implement an affirmative action plan that had been negotiated with the Equality Commission to address the underlying problem of Protestant under-representation in the Housing Executive. On 22 June 2010, I tabled a question for written answer to the Minister for Social Development asking what the composition of recruits had been in the seven years since the affirmative action plan had been put in place. After all, Mr Deputy Speaker, one would expect an affirmative action plan that is designed to address an under-representation of a particular community to give you some bang for your buck after seven years. If such an under-representation had not been eradicated, one would at least expect to see significant progress towards its eradication.

What were the figures that I received in answer to my question in June 2010? The percentage of Protestants being recruited to the Housing Executive now is less than when the affirmative action plan was put in place. Were the reverse the case, how many people across the Floor of this Chamber would be saying that it was intolerable, unacceptable and would have to be clarified? That is what they would be saying,

but the silence from all sorts across this Chamber is deafening. They do not seem to mind or care when it is only Protestants who are discriminated against.

I will put the figures on record: in 2004 — the year after the affirmative action plan was put in place — 36.6% of those recruited were Protestant; in 2009, 33.7% of those recruited were Protestant. It was worse than when the affirmative action plan was put in place. That is why there is a need for the motion. I could go on to develop other issues concerning organisations such as the Equality Commission, the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and Waterways Ireland. Many of us have campaigned on issues in regard to those bodies for many years.

The essence of the motion is that we must address underlying problems of under-representation on the basis of merit. I am not asking for 50:50 recruitment to the Housing Executive, nor is my party campaigning for it, although it would be more justifiable than for the police. We are asking for merit to apply.

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

Mr Campbell: Where merit must apply, we must see outcomes to affirmative action programmes. I rest my case on the motion.

Mr McLaughlin: Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I state at the outset that my party will support the motion. Notwithstanding the mistaken and partisan approach to the question, I take the view that, despite our differences, equality does not threaten anyone except those who have a vested interest in continued division. If we can refine and improve the current policies, we should do so, and we should not be afraid to acknowledge that improvements can be made.

Let me also state clearly that there is a history here that we cannot deny. There has been abuse of power. I will not go off on the familiar rant, but it is, at this stage, incontrovertible that there was an abuse of power during 50 years of one-party rule in this state. That set down the patterns of division in communities and in society that many people from across the different parties in the Assembly are tasked to address. However, those patterns are there and still affect us. No one who is seriously interested in achieving the maximum level of

equality and equality of opportunity that we can devise through our collective efforts should, in any sense at all, retreat from the need to take remedial measures. Those patterns are so deeply set that it will take affirmative action proposals for us to recognise how we can change them.

I hope that the proposers of the motion will address my key point and accept my bona fides in making it. It is in no one's interest to reverse the process that affected a group of victims of a discriminatory public policy. That was official policy, and it affected people on the basis of their perceived religious or political affiliation. It was not just tolerated, it was prosecuted. Those patterns are a standing disgrace that must be addressed.

I hope that the proposers of today's motion are, in fact, raising concerns that, perhaps, there is a danger that we are drifting towards the position that Gregory Campbell outlined. If that is the case, I want to do something about it. If he believes that, in providing equal opportunity, a new system of discrimination has emerged, I will work with him. It should be possible to see that in the same way that it is easy to establish the pattern of discrimination that existed under one-party rule and under the abuse of the then unionist party. That is not the biggest or most rigorous task.

However, if, under the current arrangements, there are patterns, or the beginning of evidence trails, to demonstrate overcompensation, I did not hear them being mentioned in the proposition that you put forward. For you simply to suggest that people from the Catholic persuasion now enjoy the benefits of equal opportunity is not the same as identifying active discrimination against people from the Protestant community. Perhaps you are making a well-meaning effort to ensure that we do not make the same mistakes of the past, and I join you on that. However, it would help if your motion was supported —

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

Mr McLaughlin: Indeed I will.

It would help greatly if your proposition and supporting remarks were presented as an acknowledgement of the mistakes that were made over many previous generations and left a task that we must all share. Therefore,

if we start by acknowledging that there was a problem, and on the basis that we wish not to reverse those patterns of discrimination but produce a society of equals, we can all work together. That should be the proper approach of all parties in the Assembly.

Mr Beggs: I, too, welcome the opportunity to speak on the motion. I caution all Members to speak in a measured tone, because we must be careful not to contribute to heightening the tension in society. I ask that Members be thoughtful in what they say and do not give others an excuse to heighten sectarian tension.

The motion states that any indication of failings in the recruitment process, particularly in the public sector, should be addressed.

2.00 pm

From the outset, I want to make it clear that the Ulster Unionist Party supports the merit principle for employment throughout society. Equality of opportunity must be provided. However, we also recognise and support the benefits of having a workforce that is broadly reflective of the working-age population and, therefore, seek reassurance that there are no barriers preventing that equality of opportunity and employment on the merit principle.

The Member who proposed the motion highlighted the valid point that the Northern Ireland Housing Executive has a disparity in the composition of its employees. We are looking at figures from the Equality Commission's 2008 monitoring report. What happened in 2009? If that information could be brought forward in a more timely fashion, that would be helpful; we could talk about how things are today, not how they were two years ago. The report shows that public employment broadly reflected the composition of the working population. It shows that 54·7% of the workforce came from the Protestant community and that 54·6% of the public service workforce came from the Protestant community. It shows that 45·3% of the working-age population came from the Roman Catholic community and that 44·6% of the public service workforce came from that community. Those figures were broadly in line with the overall figure.

One of the interesting findings in the Equality Committee's document is that two thirds of public sector leavers are from the Protestant community. That means that there is a demographic time bomb. More older employees

from the Protestant community are retiring, and that means that there is a danger that community imbalance could worsen in a different direction. It appears that there is a reasonable balance in recruitment generally but that there are some specific issues. For example, Protestant recruitment to the Housing Executive has varied from 41% to 33%, a very low figure. Around five or six years ago, I took part in a meeting with opinion formers and I know that some attempt was made to address the issue, but I have not heard about any follow-up since then and I am not aware of what proactive programmes have been running to try to ensure that applications come forward and that there is balance, with appointments being made on the merit principle.

An issue that was relevant in the past was the number of students who left Northern Ireland to study in other parts of the United Kingdom, many of whom did not come back. I understand that that figure has improved in that fewer students have been going away, but it would be interesting if the Minister could reflect on that and on any bearing that it might have on the appointment process.

I would also be interested to hear not only from the Finance Minister but from the Minister for Social Development about the overall numbers of applications to the Housing Executive and its composition. Will he confirm any geographical trends that may exist? Is it an issue in different parts of Northern Ireland? Are there areas where members of the Protestant community do not feel welcome and safe? Do such issues need to be addressed? It would be helpful if we were to learn more about that.

The merit principle should be applied to employment generally. and let there be no doubt that the 50:50 recruitment process to the PSNI is offensive to people who are classed as "others". Anyone who is in that category —

A Member: Will the Member give way?

Mr Beggs: I am running out of time.

Anyone who is in that category is being discriminated against and, therefore, the sooner it comes to an end and everyone in Northern Ireland is employed on merit, the better.

Mr O'Loan: I regard the motion as fundamentally misconceived. It is born of a fixation on the part of the proposer with the employment practice

in one particular organisation. If he had been willing to look at the situation in the round, he would not have pursued the issue in the way that he has done with a series of questions.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr S Wilson): Will the Member give way?

Mr O'Loan: I am surprised to be asked to give way by the Minister at this point, but I will give way.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: Does fixation about one particular sector include the police?

Mr O'Loan: I think that the Minister misunderstood me. I was referring to the proposer's clear fixation with one organisation in particular, and that is the one that is named in the motion. He is fundamentally wrong in his reckoning of that organisation and, particularly, of the whole of the public sector. I also criticise the co-signatory of the motion, Lord Morrow, for his statement in the public arena that Protestants are grossly under-represented in the Housing Executive. That is not so; they are significantly under-represented. It is better that we stick to the facts and do not exaggerate them.

I agree with a substantial amount of the motion or, at any rate, I agree with it to some extent. The motion notes:

"the importance of ensuring that public sector recruitment is based on the merit principle".

I could not agree more with that. However, I am entitled to point out that the Member and his party stood against the mechanisms that were necessary in law and the actions of the Equality Commission to ensure that the merit principle was applied to public sector employment.

The motion also states:

"there are still areas of the public sector where under-representation of certain communities appears to be worsening".

I challenge the Member to produce facts that justify that. The trends show that we have succeeded in achieving a situation in which there is, broadly, a much better balance in employment as a result of good legislation.

Mr Campbell: Will the Member give way?

Mr O'Loan: I will proceed for the moment. I will specifically address the point in the motion about the Housing Executive. The motion asks:

"the Minister of Finance and Personnel to take further measures to ensure that recruitment in the public sector is more broadly reflective of the working-age population."

As I said, the trends are absolutely moving in that direction. However, if the Member reads the facts, such as the 2007 review of fair participation in the Civil Service and the Equality Commission's monitoring report, he will realise that the situation is considerably more sophisticated than he says. Comparisons with the appropriate census figures and the appropriate age group are considerably more complex than he cares to read them.

I wish to comment on the broad situation. If the Member reads the Equality Commission 2008 monitoring report, he will see that the composition of the public sector as a whole, to the nearest percentage point, was 55% Protestant and 45% Catholic. Incidentally, if the Member wants to ask questions about an issue, he might be concerned that two thirds of public sector employees are female. That is an interesting issue for us to address. He might also be prepared to look at the issue of applicants and appointees, given that 54% of applicants are Protestant and 46% are Catholic, and that 54% of appointees are Protestant and 46% are Catholic. As I said, getting the exact comparisons with census figures is not as easy or as simplistic as the Member chooses to make out. Nonetheless, any reasonable person who looks at those figures would say that we are getting something like a broad balance across the relevant sections of the working population.

If Mr Campbell were to look at the trends over the past seven years, he would find that, in the public sector as a whole, the Protestant section of the workforce has reduced significantly and the Catholic section has increased significantly. That needed to happen, because, as little as 10 years ago, those sections of the population were seriously out of balance with each other. They are heading towards balancing out now as a result of the legislation that was brought into existence.

I do not know why the Member singles out the Housing Executive. He does not tell us about the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service, where 62% — I am, again, rounding to the nearest percentage point — of the workforce is Protestant. He also does not tell us about the Northern Ireland Policing Board, where 76% of the workforce is Protestant. He does not tell

us about Northern Ireland Railways Company Ltd, where 70% of the workforce is Protestant. Furthermore, he does not tell us about the Police Service of Northern Ireland, where 79% of the workforce is Protestant, and he does not tell us about Ulsterbus Ltd, where 58% of workforce is Protestant. Mr Campbell also does not mention at all — I assume that this was not in the Equality Commission report because it was an NIO service at that time — about the Prison Service, where 90% of the workforce is Protestant. It is, therefore, a complete nonsense and an abuse of the facts to single out the Housing Executive on this matter. Indeed, the Housing Executive has a substantial affirmative action plan in place.

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

Mr O'Loan: I hope that the Member will concede that, when recruitment is limited, as it is at present, it takes some time to get the appropriate and necessary redress.

Dr Farry: The Alliance Party can support the motion on the basis of subscribing to the merit principle and to the outcome of having a representative workforce. However, I want to take this opportunity to challenge how the debate on representation in the workforce has been framed. By that, I mean not just today's debate but the debate more generally. The Alliance Party has particular concerns about the use of language and about how people are perceived and counted. Indeed, it offers a liberal critique of the approach to monitoring, in that we accept the importance of monitoring itself.

The Alliance Party's central concern is that the debate is framed around a binary notion of Protestant versus Catholic and the nature of the balance between the two. That has been played out in the Chamber today, with Members quoting statistics at one another. The Alliance Party rejects the notion and the reference, not just in the motion but elsewhere, to two communities, multiple communities or certain communities. It does not dismiss for one minute that Northern Ireland is a deeply divided society and that that division relates to issues of identity. That said, however, it is more important to talk about a single overarching identity for Northern Ireland that provides room for open, mixed and multiple identities. We should try to move forward on that basis.

In the past, it was the norm to talk about the two communities. There is an almost complete coincidence in someone's political, religious and national identities. Therefore, anyone who is a unionist is assumed to be Protestant and British, and anyone who is a nationalist is assumed to be Catholic and Irish. That is simply not the case. If it were, we would have the absolutely farcical situation that would suggest that, Basil McCrea, for example, who is perhaps the most moderate of Ulster Unionists, would have more in common with Jim Allister because they both call themselves unionists than he could ever have with a member of the SDLP. I thought that we were trying to make this society work together. By the same token, Declan O'Loan, the Member who spoke most recently, would have more in common with a dissident republican who is trying to bring this place down than he would ever have with an Ulster Unionist who is trying to make this place work. Both those statements are patently untrue, which shows the fallacy of people continuing to frame the debate around two communities that are against each other.

Mr O'Loan: I will not address the Member's particular point, which was absurd. However, I will discuss his broader point. Is he saying, on behalf of his party, that he is opposed to the monitoring of employment in terms of Catholic and Protestant statistics? That is what he was saying.

Dr Farry: I will come to that point in a minute. My brief answer is that we fully support the need for monitoring. However, our approach to monitoring is no longer fit for purpose in a diverse society such as Northern Ireland. One cannot view those things in purely binary terms. Let us look at what we have in Northern Ireland. We have a growing number of mixed marriages and mixed relationships, as well as the children that result from those relationships. How on earth will we count those people? Will we pass them off to the side as aberrations in this naturally binary society that people have in mind? What about the ethnic minorities who are coming in to this society? What about people coming in from the Republic of Ireland, Great Britain or elsewhere in Europe? Indeed, what about those, particularly young people, who are moving away from traditional notions of identity? Regardless of whether those figures are borne out in the 2001 census — just wait until we see the figures in next year's census — the Northern

Ireland Life and Times surveys or other opinion polls, the evidence is overwhelming.

Whenever we talk about employment monitoring, the use of the terms “Protestant” and “Catholic”, or “Roman Catholic”, as is often used for people from the Catholic faith, is, in essence, a euphemism for unionist and nationalist. The use of those terms is about using religion as a label for political identity. That, in itself, is often dangerous. People resent being pigeonholed. They also want the right to have their identity, even a mixed identity, valued in the same way that someone from a Protestant or Catholic background has their identity valued. That is not just an issue for those in the cross-community middle; it is for people right across the spectrum. For example, there are those who call themselves Christian but not Protestant — I am not talking about people from a Catholic background in case any unionist Members intervene — but who are labelled as Protestants for this and other exercises and resent it.

2.15 pm

I accept the need for monitoring and for a representative workforce. However, given that our system of monitoring is so flawed that it is no longer fit for purpose, how on earth do we know if our workforce is balanced? I suspect that it is becoming more balanced as discrimination is eliminated, but we do not have the methodology that will lead us to the right conclusions.

Mr G Robinson: I congratulate the Members who tabled the motion. It addresses two important points: that people should be given a job on merit; and that the representation of one community in the public sector appears to be worsening.

I am a firm believer that the person who gets the job should get it on merit. I have always taken that stance and will not move from it; therefore when I see discriminatory measures such as 50:50 recruitment to the police, I do not support them. Measures such as that only ensure that those from a certain perceived background have a greater chance of a job, which may prevent others of equal or greater ability from a different perceived background from getting a job. That is not equality; that is shameful. If we want a good workforce, we should employ the right people and not the politically correct ones.

Legislation has ensured that that position becomes enshrined and acceptable to some and a source of disgust to others. If legalised discrimination is acceptable to some when it suits them, they must question their claim to be democratic. A person cannot be a democrat and support discrimination, no matter how it is dressed up.

The second point that I mentioned was the continuing under-representation of the Protestant community in some areas of the public sector. In 2009, 53% of the workforce of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive were Roman Catholic, 33.7% were Protestant and 12.9% were others; that does not reflect the population as a whole. I also want to point out an inaccuracy in section 1 of appendix 2 to the Equality Commission's monitoring report, which deals with the composition of individual specified authorities, but which does not reflect the figures that I detailed for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. The figures are detailed only as Protestant or Roman Catholic, with the others figure added to the Protestant tally. The Equality Commission needs to publish full and accurate figures and not a figure that has been made to look better. Having said that, the Equality Commission is a prime example of a body in which Protestants are grossly under-represented.

Other bodies with an uneven distribution of employment include the Special EU Programmes Body with 64% Roman Catholic workers; the Western Education and Library Board, with 64% Roman Catholic workers; the Western Health and Social Services Board with 73% Roman Catholic workers; and the Western Health and Social Care Trust, with 68% Roman Catholic workers. It is no wonder that some of those employers are seen as cold places for Protestant applicants.

If Northern Ireland is to move towards a peaceful and prosperous future for all, employment must be based on individual merit. That will go a long way to stop the exodus of young Protestants who believe that there is no future for them in Northern Ireland because of discriminatory employment practices. I do not want any discrimination for those seeking a job, and, because of a deep belief in that, I am delighted to support the motion.

Ms M Anderson: Go raibh míle maith agat. Éirím chun tacaíocht a thabhairt don mholadh

seo. I support the motion, not because I have been seduced by it or because I regard it as a Damascus-type conversion on the part of its proposers. Rather its context reflects for me the almost schizophrenic nature of some in political unionism, and I am sure that there are those outside the Assembly who would take a less benign view and regard it simply as the same old unionist sectarianism. That was demonstrated when the proposer of the motion said that there had been no systematic discrimination against Catholics — catch yourself on. The proposers call for recruitment on the merit principle but, at the same time, ask for measures to ensure that public sector recruitment broadly reflects the working-age population. The simple question must be: which do the proposers want? Have they arrived, by accident or perhaps by design, at a position in which both can be accepted? If they genuinely supported both proposals, their examples would not have focused solely on one section of the community.

In the past, the proposers made a great play of arguing that the workforces of the Equality Commission and the Housing Executive, which is cited in today's motion, do not reflect the working-age population. Have the proposers considered that the workforce in those organisations reflects the merit principle? I do not think that they have, because that is not how they approach such issues generally.

The proposers are guided by the notion that the proportion of Protestant workers in those organisations does not reflect their percentage of the workforce; the DUP spokesperson said something similar earlier. However, let me be clear: Sinn Féin is absolutely opposed to discrimination, no matter where it arises or against whom it is directed, whether Protestants, Catholics, men, women or, perhaps more challengingly for the DUP, members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community, new nationals or ethnic minorities.

The Housing Executive has launched an affirmative action programme that aims to increase the number of Protestant applicants. To that end, its community liaison officer already works with controlled schools. I welcome the proposers' new-found support for affirmative action, as demonstrated by their call for the Minister of Finance and Personnel to take further measures to ensure that public sector recruitment reflects the working-age population.

However, are they the same people — I believe that they are — who were the voices against 50:50 recruitment to the PSNI, even though that process is designed to ensure that its make-up more broadly reflects the working-age population?

The motion lacks any mention of the similar inequalities that exist in the Civil Service. I acknowledge that the proposer's comments bordered on the fact that women and Catholics are under-represented at senior level, although he went on to try to dismiss that to some extent by saying that something was being done to address that. Across the Civil Service, only about one third of those at grade 5 and above are Catholics and a quarter are women. The figures for people with a disability and for ethnic minorities are even more scandalous. Therefore, despite the proposers' one-sided approach, support for the motion goes well beyond their narrow definitions. In voting for the motion, they will support affirmative action and equality for opportunity in our society, including the LGBT community, with which some DUP members seem to have so much difficulty. Therefore, the proposers could be hoisted with their own petard.

Mr S Anderson: I support the motion and commend my colleagues for tabling it. Any recruitment and promotion process must ensure that the best person is appointed to the post. We ought to recruit on the basis of merit and merit alone; we depart from that principle at our peril. I accept that, in the past, there were problems with recruiting enough members of the Roman Catholic community to the RUC. However, many factors contributed to that, none more so than intimidation from within the Roman Catholic community against their own people.

The pendulum has now swung too far the other way. In a rush to redress the perceived imbalance, those in authority have overreacted. In attempting to address one set of problems, they have merely created another.

Although it is not named on the motion before us and does not fall within the remit of the Finance Minister, I feel that it is only right to mention the worst example of institutionalised employment discrimination in Northern Ireland today. The 50:50 police recruitment policy is blatantly sectarian and openly discriminates against people on the sole grounds of their religion. It is shocking that the very parties that claim to be the inheritors of the Northern Ireland

civil rights movement are the loudest supporters of that religious discrimination in the workplace. That the policy was conceived in the mind of an Ulster Unionist — Ken Maginnis — is a truly sorry fact of history.

Turning to the Civil Service, it must be stated that the policy of encouraging members of the Roman Catholic community to apply to the Civil Service created a feeling of despondency and despair among Protestants. Many Protestants, especially Protestant males, wondered whether there was any point in applying for the Civil Service, even if they exceeded the necessary qualifications.

There has also been an imbalance in Civil Service promotions. Let us not forget that. After numerous rejections and promotion board after promotion board, along with the failure to get satisfactory explanations and feedback, some Protestant employees simply gave up, and others left the Civil Service altogether. Therefore, I was not surprised to note from the 2008 statistics that there was a fall in Protestant representation in public sector employment of 2·4%, while Roman Catholic representation rose by 0·8%.

In my constituency, I am still approached by Protestants, mainly male Protestants, who cannot understand why their applications for even the most junior posts in the Civil Service are not successful, even though they meet the required criteria. Therefore, I ask the Finance Minister to keep a very close eye on Civil Service recruitment and promotion.

The motion also calls particular attention to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. Historically, that body has been disgracefully imbalanced against the Protestant community. For years, we were told that the problem was being addressed. We have had an affirmative action plan in place since 2003, but little has been delivered. In the first year of the affirmative action plan, 52·5% of new entrants were Roman Catholic and 36·6% were Protestant. The balance tilted slightly towards Protestants in 2005 but swung away again very markedly in 2006 and 2007. By 2008, things seemed to improve, but it was only a flash in the pan. By 2009, 53·4% of new entrants were Roman Catholic, 33·7% were Protestants and 12·9% were non-determined. The Housing Executive's reputation is one of being a cold house for

Protestants, and they must put that reputation to rest once and for all.

I would like to say something briefly about the Equality Commission. It has failed to regard the Protestant population and to address many key concerns about public sector recruitment, and it must clean up its act in that regard. We face inevitable budget cuts, and recruitment to the public service will be reduced drastically. Therefore, it is imperative that our public service is more broadly reflective of our working-age population. We must get it right. I support the motion.

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

The debate stood suspended.

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

2.30 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Integrated Development Fund

1. **Mr McClarty** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what new work has been carried out under the integrated development fund in the last two years. (AQO 239/11)

The deputy First Minister (Mr M McGuinness):

The integrated development fund (IDF) was an initiative by the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) aimed at building on existing local partnership working to produce and implement integrated development strategies for identified local areas. The fund's main aim was to address a range of social and economic issues in selected areas.

During the past two years, new work has been carried out on three projects for which integrated development fund support was approved by us and the Minister of Finance and Personnel. Details of the projects are as follows. On 26 November 2008, £1.387 million of IDF funding was approved for the redevelopment and refurbishment of the First Derry Presbyterian Church, which cost a total of £2.27 million. IDF funding provision for that project was to assist to preserve the built fabric of the church and to contribute to the tourism product in Derry city.

On 26 January 2009, £2 million of IDF funding was approved for the renovation and restoration of St Columb's Church of Ireland Cathedral. The total cost of the project was £2.629 million. The purpose of IDF funding for that project was to assist to maximise St Columb's Cathedral's ecclesiastical and tourism potential.

On 5 February 2009, £3.1 million of IDF funding was approved for the Colin gateway project. The total cost of the project is £4.6 million. The project's aim is to deliver integrated environmental improvement of Belfast's Stewartstown Road and the physical

regeneration of key nodes and linkages along that road. A key objective of the work is to enable the creation of a town centre for the Colin area. The project's promoter is Lisburn City Council.

Mr McClarty: I thank the deputy First Minister for his response. He has suggested that the integrated development fund is managed by the economic policy unit in OFMDFM. Will he indicate whether management of the fund is planned centrally or is merely reactive to proposals from other Departments and agencies in much the same way as the Northern Ireland Tourist Board operates?

The deputy First Minister: Obviously, the economic policy unit recognises, as does OFMDFM, the key role that other Departments play. Indeed, in many cases, other Departments are the delivery mechanism for funds that are made available.

Mr Burns: How much of the budget has been spent on salaries, consultants or project delivery?

The deputy First Minister: With respect, it is impossible to give a figure for any of that offhand. However, I am sure that officials will write to the Member with that detail.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Will the deputy First Minister confirm that the Department is developing a programme to tackle disadvantage that is measured by objective need, which will build on the success of aspects of the integrated development fund?

The deputy First Minister: Now that work on IDF funding is winding down, that policy area is being developed by our officials and will include consultation with a number of relevant Departments and other organisations. Our Department has policy responsibility for addressing poverty. Our objective is to have sustainable intervention in areas that suffer most from poverty and disadvantage. That will be done at a number of levels by providing tangible programmes to deal with those difficult issues. Jobs, community confidence and positive environments help to underpin equality and sharing of areas and services. That programme will, therefore, be developed through OFMDFM and its partner organisations working with targeted communities to develop plans to which all Executive members can respond. The programme that we hope to develop will be additional and complementary to those of

other Departments. Collectively, we need to have significant intervention that will tackle disadvantage, deprivation and poverty in a strategic way where the impact can be seen, felt and believed by everyone in the community.

Quangos

2. **Mr Savage** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline any plans to reduce the number of commissions and quangos. (AQO 240/11)

11. **Mr A Maskey** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for their assessment of how a more efficient use of quangos could reduce administration costs and ensure that front-line services are safeguarded. (AQO 249/11)

The deputy First Minister: A Cheann Comhairle, with your permission, I will answer questions 2 and 11 together.

Publicly funded bodies can and do play an important role in the delivery of public services. That said, it is essential that they operate efficiently and look continuously and creatively at how best those services can be delivered, so as to most effectively meet their objectives and serve the public.

Members will be aware of the Executive's establishment of a ministerial Budget review group, which has commissioned a range of information to inform its approach to the major financial challenges that we face. As part of that work, we will be looking carefully at the scope to achieve greater efficiencies in our public bodies and to yield savings without a loss of vital public services. That will include examining the options for reductions, amalgamations or greater use of shared services and shared facilities across public bodies.

Mr Savage: I thank the deputy First Minister for his answer. Will the deputy First Minister and his party enter the real world and accept the fact that cuts are coming? With that in mind, will he and the First Minister agree to set up a working group to see where quangos and commissions can be culled or amalgamated? We have to bear in mind that a lot of the chairs of the committees and quangos receive twice the salary of any MLA who is sitting here today.

Mr Speaker: I urge the Member to come to his question.

Mr Savage: The whole thing is wrong.

The deputy First Minister: As many Members know, I was at the Conservative Party conference. I spoke at a fringe meeting, when the new leader of the Ulster Unionist Party was also in attendance. I read in a newspaper that the first item on his agenda was what the Conservative Government are going to do about the way that the First Minister and deputy First Minister are elected. I thought that the first item on his agenda would be the fight against cuts, but that was not the case. That is being left to the First Minister and me.

We were supported by other parties over the weekend. It would be in the interests of our entire community if all the parties in the Assembly weighed in behind us at a time of great discussion and debate around the possible reneging of an agreement that was made with all the parties, including the Ulster Unionist Party, prior to the establishment of these institutions.

As many Members will know, we have established a Budget review group. At the Executive meeting that was convened in Greenmount College on 6 July 2010, it was agreed that a ministerial subgroup would be established to consider a range of strategic issues relevant to the formulation of Budget 2010. The Budget review group includes the First Minister, myself, the Finance Minister, the Employment and Learning Minister, the Social Development Minister and the Justice Minister. The review group commissioned the secretary to the Executive to produce a set of papers for discussion on key cross-cutting issues, such as capital investment plans, additional revenue-raising options, flexibility in respect of discretionary spend, impact of savings, local taxes and charges, public sector pay, public bodies, reduction in bureaucracy, and east-west and North/South co-operation opportunities. Since the Greenmount meeting, a considerable amount of work was commissioned on those issues across all Departments, and the Budget review group has held preliminary discussions on some of the key issues and has commissioned a range of further work, which includes bringing forward more developed proposals on the options for rationalising arm's-length bodies or, in other words, quangos.

The Member needs to understand that many of us are in considerable sympathy with some of

the points that he has made. As we go forward, all this will include consideration of options for reducing the cost base of arm's-length bodies through, for example, amalgamation and the sharing of corporate services. Those issues are not the holy grail. We are in a difficult economic situation, and I think that our Executive are committed to looking seriously at how we can make further savings.

Mr McDevitt: Does the deputy First Minister agree with his colleague Martina Anderson who, on 28 July, said that we are spending a staggering £9.7 billion in this region on unelected quangos? She claimed that that figure is 75% of our total Budget. Does the deputy First Minister agree that Ms Anderson is in fact correct that those largely unaccountable organisations, which, of course, include health trusts, cannot and should not be sustained?

The deputy First Minister: I always agree with Martina Anderson. We all know that a number of different propositions have been made by a number of Departments about how we can further make savings and efficiencies and provide a much leaner, but much more productive, service for the people we represent.

Dr Farry: Although the rationalisation of government is very important, does the deputy First Minister agree that there are even greater potential savings to be found through tackling the cost of duplication in a divided society? In that light, will he clarify his stance on the issue of shared education?

The deputy First Minister: As a former Minister of Education, I am a huge supporter of those families who choose to have their children educated through the medium of integrated education, just as I am a keen supporter of those families who choose a Catholic education system, the state-controlled education system, or education through the medium of Irish. I said when I came into the Department at the very beginning that we would attempt to provide choice for all. I recently attended the opening of the new St Mary's College on the Northland Road in Derry, where well over 88% of young people left with 5 or more GCSEs, and 96% of those young people left with two A levels or more. Those are results that would be the envy of many a grammar school in the North.

Equality Legislation

3. **Mr McCarthy** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an outline of any future plans for equality legislation. (AQO 241/11)

The deputy First Minister: We are considering the options for legislative reform here. When we have made a decision, we will outline our proposals.

Mr McCarthy: My goodness, that was a short one. I am delighted to see that the deputy First Minister is now going for short answers.

Given that the Executive have abandoned the single equality Bill and the Equality Act 2010 has been passed at Westminster, and bearing in mind that Northern Ireland had been to the forefront in relation to equality issues, what are the Executive going to do to close the gap, and when?

The deputy First Minister: First of all, no decision has been taken in relation to a single equality Bill. We continue to keep the broad spectrum of equality legislation under review, and the St Andrews working group, which the junior Ministers chair, is also considering the issue. The Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister is committed to the principle of equality for all. Work on equality legislation continues in order to deliver on our commitments in the Programme for Government, EU obligations, case law requirements and emerging issues.

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful for the deputy First Minister's earlier replies. Do Ministers have any proposals for the rationalisation of equality legislation in light of the saving imperatives imposed by block grant spending cuts?

The deputy First Minister: All of us in the House understand that, as we go forward, everything is under renewed consideration. We consistently challenge ourselves to see how we can deliver for the people that we represent in a very efficient way. We are conscious of our responsibilities in that regard.

Mr Campbell: Equality legislation should offer minority communities across Northern Ireland the hope of fairness and the expectation that an acknowledgement of their cultural outlook will be obtained. In that context, does the deputy First Minister think it is a coincidence that, in areas where his party has the most electoral

support, there is hardly a Protestant about the place?

2.45 pm

The deputy First Minister: I could not accept that for one minute. It is quite clear that the party that I represent is absolutely committed to equality. I have often said that I am not looking for equality for Catholics, I am looking for equality for everyone: Catholic, Protestant and Dissenter.

Mr Leonard: Given the limited scope of the protection under the Equality Act 2010 compared with the much more comprehensive section 75 legislation, is he able to assure the House that any future equality legislation will not be regressive?

The deputy First Minister: The simple answer to that is yes. It is important that we recognise the particular circumstances that apply to the North. The 1998 Act, which flowed from the Good Friday Agreement, laid out protections for a number of groups across our society. The sad reality was that it was necessary to offer those protections.

However, we all understand that we are living in new times; this is a new age. There is a duty on everybody in government to ensure that absolutely nobody is discriminated against. None of us would want to be part of any institution that discriminated against anybody on the basis of their religion or all the other issues. There may be examples of people feeling that they are being discriminated against, and that represents a challenge for us that we have to rise to. If people raise in the House issues of concern to them, including the issue raised by the Member for East Derry, it is incumbent on us all to take that seriously.

Mr P Ramsey: It is reassuring to hear the deputy First Minister tell us that the single equality Bill has not been abandoned. Will he outline the time frame for the Bill, and why there has been a delay?

The deputy First Minister: I do not need to explain to the Member why there has been a delay. He understands quite well. Suffice to say that it is a work in progress, and I am as anxious as anybody to get us to a position where there is a single equality Bill.

Budget 2010-11: Treasury Discussions

4. **Ms M Anderson** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on their discussions with the Treasury in London on the need for a special package to ensure economic recovery, the development of efficient and effective public services and to tackle disadvantage. (AQO 242/11)

5. **Mr Hamilton** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on their recent meeting with the Chancellor of the Exchequer. (AQO 243/11)

6. **Mr Ross** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on their meeting with the Chancellor and whether they can confirm that a significant amount of the Northern Ireland block grant will be identified through formulae and not negotiated with the Treasury. (AQO 244/11)

The deputy First Minister: With your permission, Mr Speaker, I will answer questions 4, 5 and 6 together.

The First Minister and I met the Chancellor of the Exchequer, George Osborne, on Tuesday 28 September to discuss the forthcoming Budget announcement and its potential impact here. We are particularly concerned at the latest forecasts, which suggest that the capital budget will be significantly constrained over the four-year spending review period, falling by almost 50% in real terms in 2014-15. That is totally unacceptable to the First Minister and me.

We reminded the Chancellor of the commitments given by the previous Government at St Andrews that at least £18 billion over a 10-year period would be guaranteed. He undertook to investigate that. Last Thursday, the First Minister, the Finance Minister and I joined our counterparts in Scotland and Wales as co-signatories of a joint declaration calling on the Westminster Government to reconsider their approach to the spending review. The declaration's key message is our common concern about the social and economic consequences of cuts that are too deep and run the risk of stalling any recovery.

We also met the Deputy Prime Minister, Nick Clegg, on Thursday and reinforced that message with him. We are encouraged by his subsequent commitment to look again at the level of spending cuts proposed for here. We

wrote to David Cameron, with the endorsement of the Executive, reiterating our request for an urgent meeting on the Budget settlement. We underlined the cross-party nature of the agreement with the previous Government on the financial settlement, which led to the establishment of these institutions in May 2007.

The First Minister and I are agreed that the scale of the proposed cuts being speculated on in the public domain would have a very damaging impact on our efforts to grow the economy and protect our most disadvantaged communities. We asked the British Government to reconsider the scale of the cuts and to take account of the particular circumstances here.

We also know how reliant we are on the public sector here, and that large cuts to the block grant, through the working of the Barnett formula, will affect the whole economy, thereby potentially slowing recovery, rather than hastening it. We are keen to look at ways in which we can achieve better value for money in the delivery of public services, and, at the same time, continue to support those most in need, which is critical in the current environment. The First Minister and I are happy to update the House on an ongoing basis as the Budget picture becomes clearer.

Ms M Anderson: Go raibh míle maith agat. I thank the Minister for that comprehensive response. What are the Executive doing to ensure that the most vulnerable and disadvantaged in our society are protected in the forthcoming Budget?

The deputy First Minister: Following the Executive awayday at Greenmount, we made it clear that one of our priorities would be to protect our most vulnerable citizens, especially those at risk of poverty and social exclusion. In our bids for the forthcoming comprehensive spending review (CSR), we have sought funding to target some of our most disadvantaged areas and for a pilot project to look at the impact of an increase in earnings disregard. Through the workings of the Executive subcommittee on poverty and social inclusion, we have also asked our officials to undertake work with colleagues from other Departments to progress priority actions that will benefit the individuals, groups and areas in greatest objective need. We are also developing a child poverty strategy, which will be laid before the Assembly by 25 March

2011 and will set out the Executive's plan to work towards the eradication of child poverty.

Mr Hamilton: The Deputy Prime Minister, Nick Clegg, seemed confused last week that the £18 billion capital pledge by the previous Government was not raised at the meeting with the Chancellor. Will the deputy First Minister clear up that confusion by confirming that that pledge was raised at his and the First Minister's meeting with the Chancellor last week?

The deputy First Minister: Yes, I have to say that I was very surprised when I read in 'The Irish News' that Nick Clegg had raised questions about whether the First Minister and I had broached that subject with the Chancellor at our previous meeting. The fact is, and the minutes will show, that the issue was raised very forcibly in the course of that meeting. It is a worrying development that the Deputy Prime Minister is not aware of the reality of that engagement.

It was also very significant at that engagement that the Chancellor, George Osborne, asked the First Minister and me to furnish him with the details of the agreements made at St Andrews and the discussions that followed from that, which culminated in the meeting that took place at Downing Street, at which representatives of all the parties in this House were present. That was followed by the then Chancellor of the Exchequer, Gordon Brown, going out to the front steps of Downing Street and making public the agreement and the commitments that were made. He followed that up on 8 May 2007, the day that Ian Paisley and I went into government together, by lodging in the Houses of Parliament his ministerial statement confirming the extent of that package, which includes the guarantee — and he is the person who used the word "guarantee" — of £18 billion for our capital building programme up until 2017. So, there can be no doubt about it whatsoever. The issue was raised at the meeting with the Chancellor and has been raised ever since.

We also took the opportunity when President Clinton was at the Magee campus, just two weeks ago, to apprise him of that agreement. He was on our side in regard to the responsibility that the coalition Government have to honour the commitments that were made. I hope that the coalition Government do not dishonour the commitments that were made. I hope that, like the Irish Government, who committed very substantial funds to infrastructural projects in

the North and who pledged to honour those commitments, the coalition Government led by the Tories will do likewise.

Mr Ross: Does the deputy First Minister agree that despite opposition from the Ulster Unionist Party, it can be beneficial for Northern Ireland to work along with the leaders of the other devolved institutions within the United Kingdom in discussions with the Chancellor?

The deputy First Minister: Absolutely. Scotland, Wales and ourselves are singing from the same hymn sheet. We all recognise, particularly in our case because we have not come out of recession, that there is a very real danger that the approach being adopted, with cuts that are too deep and too fast, will plunge us further into recession. That is a very real danger for our economy.

I have to say that I am taken aback at the lack of support shown by the Ulster Unionist Party for our efforts to hold the British Government to the commitments that they made. Many people who support the Ulster Unionists must be absolutely dismayed that, at a time of economic peril for us and for all the people we represent, one party in the Assembly is not only not being helpful, but is being very unhelpful in some of the utterances that it has made.

Mr K Robinson: I thank the deputy First Minister for his comments; not the political ones, but the factual ones. Will he update the House on the discussions that he had with Government last week regarding the Presbyterian Mutual Society (PMS)? What is the position of those talks?

The deputy First Minister: That is a very important issue. The First Minister and I, along with the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and the Minister of Finance and Personnel, have been involved in a series of discussions with the new coalition Government, specifically with the Treasury, in the company of Owen Paterson and others. We are very conscious of the hardships that are being imposed on ordinary savers in the Presbyterian Mutual Society, particularly elderly people who are trying to work out care packages for the future, as well as their families.

The issue a real concern. We had some initial hiccups, for want of a better word, in so far as when we first broached the subject with the new Administration, they effectively told us that we had to make a wholly new submission to them, because they said that they did not have access

to the papers of the previous Administration. However, we have now done that, and we have had discussions with them. Recently, a Treasury Minister met us in Belfast, and another meeting is due within the next few days.

The new Administration have pledged to expedite this issue as quickly as possible, and we have applied huge pressure. Obviously, the best solution would be if a financial institution were prepared to take over the PMS but, failing that, we have plans to try to save as many people from pain as possible, because they are undoubtedly suffering at this time.

Mr Speaker: Questions 5 and 6 have been answered.

Childcare Strategy

7. **Mr Lyttle** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what progress has been made in the development of a strategy for childcare provision. (AQO 245/11)

The deputy First Minister: Mr Speaker, with your permission, I will ask junior Minister Kelly to respond to that question.

The junior Minister (Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister) (Mr G Kelly): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. The ministerial subcommittee on children and young people identified childcare as a priority issue and agreed that a policy and economic appraisal should be carried out on a range of strategic options. A paper on the report has now been prepared for the Executive. It outlines the appraisal's key findings and, when the Executive have had an opportunity to consider the paper, the next phase of the work on the development of a childcare strategy will begin. That will require public consultation. That work will be carried out in a cross-departmental way, with an identified lead Department.

We will consult the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister as the work progresses. The report contains a timetable of actions, and estimates of the financial implications of those actions. It is expected that the report will form part of the evidence base underpinning the public consultation.

Mr Lyttle: I thank the junior Minister for his response. Can he give us any idea as to a timescale for the completion of the process?

The junior Minister (Mr G Kelly): I suppose the only answer to that is: as soon as possible. We have declared this matter a priority. We know that, especially in the present economic circumstances, this issue affects most families, and we will complete it as quickly as possible.

Ms Ní Chuilín: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Will the Minister provide an update on the play policy and associated implementation plan?

The junior Minister (Mr G Kelly): Following the publication of the play and leisure policy statement in December 2008, a cross-sectoral group has been working to develop an implementation plan to deliver the key aims and objectives within it. We have issued a copy of the draft plan to Ministers and to the OFMDFM Committee for their views before formal submission to the Executive for approval later this month.

3.00 pm

Employment and Learning

NEETs

1. **Mr P J Bradley** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline any plans and targets he has for people not in education, employment or training. (AQO 253/11)

4. **Mr Molloy** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on his bid to the Executive regarding the development of a strategy for people not in education, employment or training to address the increasing numbers of young people who are unemployed. (AQO 256/11)

9. **Rev Dr Robert Coulter** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline progress on the development of a strategy for people not in education, employment or training. (AQO 261/11)

The Minister for Employment and Learning

(Sir Reg Empey): With your permission, Mr Speaker, I will take questions 1, 4 and 9 together.

Reducing the number of young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) is a key priority for those caught in the category, for all of us economically and socially in Northern

Ireland and for me personally. It is also a key concern for the Northern Ireland Executive.

In making substantial headway on the issue, my Department has taken the lead in producing a scoping study. It is clear from that that the issues affecting those young people are cross-departmental and multi-agency in nature. At their meeting on 22 July, the Executive agreed, on the back of the findings of the scoping study, that a cross-departmental mechanism should be put in place to develop a strategic approach to tackling the issue.

Developing a cross-departmental mechanism is crucial, and officials have been seeking views as to what shape that will take. In doing so, Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) senior officials have already met with counterparts in most of the key Departments: the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM), the Department for Social Development (DSD), the Department of Justice (DOJ), the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS), the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI), and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD). They also briefed the Committee for Employment and Learning.

The outcome of all that activity has been very positive. We are putting together a framework for the production of a draft strategy, which we hope to bring forward for consultation early in the new year. We plan that that strategy will set the broad direction for more co-ordinated and effective action for reducing the number of our young people who have fallen into the NEET category. Key areas in the strategy are likely to be the broad themes of information, prevention, intervention and good practice.

Mr P J Bradley: I thank the Minister for his answer. Does he acknowledge the contribution of the voluntary and community sector in delivering on the needs of people who are not in employment, training or education? Will he agree to a formal stakeholders' forum involving the community sector and his Department?

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

I am very happy to look at any of the key stakeholders. The voluntary and community sector is involved already in delivering a number of programmes on our behalf. We are very aware of the role that the third sector can play because it operates at a local level, has access to many of the young people and has knowledge

of their family and personal circumstances. The Department is always open to ensuring that there is adequate consultation with the voluntary and community sector. That sector plays a very significant part in the delivery of many of our programmes.

Rev Dr Robert Coulter: Does the Minister agree that part of the problem is the fact that so many young people enter further and higher education with limited abilities in learning and numeracy? What percentage of young people have to be retrained when they enter further education?

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

Sadly, the Member has touched on a very critical point. As the House is probably aware, in 2008-09, some 82% of young people who left school at year 12 — that is, at the age of 16 — did not achieve at least five GCSE A-C grades including both English and Maths. That represented 7,281 of the 8,879 people who left school in that year. The most recent labour force survey estimates that 15,000 people who are aged between 16 and 19 in Northern Ireland are not in education, employment or training. That is about 16% of people in that age group. Although we compare similarly with England and Wales and better than Scotland, the point that the Member makes is that there is a continuous supply of people coming out of full-time school education without those basic qualifications or even the basic grasp of some of the subjects. Certainly, they do not have proper numeracy and literacy skills, which is why my Department has to engage with an essential skills strategy. As Members will know, it is far more difficult to deliver those services to young adults at that age than it is to deal with the problem in earlier years. That goes to the very heart of the problems that we face on this issue.

Ms S Ramsey: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answers. It is great that officials are talking to one another across Departments.

I welcome the Minister's and the sector's commitment to trying to tackle the issue of NEETs. If we are to get young people into education or training, will the Minister give us a more detailed assessment of where he thinks NEETs will be this time next year?

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

That is tied up with current economic circumstances. Although the figures that I gave are for last year, the economic downturn will

inevitably have some impact on the issue. The downturn has resulted in an increase in youth unemployment and hence, in overall terms, to the number of people not in education, employment or training. However, it is important to bear in mind that the situation is a consequence of global and external factors. Increasing job opportunities when the economy improves will address those issues, but the downturn exacerbates our difficulty. As the Member pointed out, in the present difficult economic circumstances, more and more young people are becoming unemployed.

Sadly, the trend in youth unemployment and in overall unemployment is still gradually upwards. As I told the Executive, my office has no evidence of any cessation of that trend, and I consider that unemployment will continue to grow this year and next. That is what we are planning for, Mr Speaker, and that makes the problem for those young people worse. However, that does not relieve the Assembly or any of us of our responsibility for the point made by Rev Robert Coulter, which was that that does not explain why so many young people leave the education system unable to read and write properly. That is a totally different matter outside economic circumstances. Nevertheless, economic circumstances make it more, not less, difficult.

Mr Campbell: The Minister will be aware that quite a number of people in hard-to-reach communities are simply not availing themselves of courses in the various regional colleges. I put on record my thanks to the staff of the Northern Regional College for a project that I helped to launch last week. To ensure that people who want to volunteer to reach communities that are not being reached are assisted by flexible programmes designed to help hard-to-reach communities, will the Minister look at the criteria for some of the programmes in regional colleges?

The Minister for Employment and Learning: I am happy to look at any such proposals. Indeed, if the Member has particular suggestions, I would appreciate his writing to me with them. There is no doubt that we engage and contract with people and organisations that specialise in trying to reach people in marginalised communities. I am thinking of organisations such as the Prince's Trust. Money is provided to our further education colleges to get to harder-to-reach learners.

As I said to Mr Bradley, the voluntary and community sector also has an important role to play. What worries me most is that the basic pool of people not in education, employment or training is not diminishing to the extent that we would like, and that is not entirely because of our economic circumstances. With the investment that we put into the continuum of education, the structural failures throughout the system that leave thousands of young people without those abilities does no credit to us. We are no worse than anywhere else in the United Kingdom; indeed, we are better than most, but I still say that it is not right. I am happy to take on board what the Member said and if he cares to write to me, I will look into it.

DEL: Ministerial Visit to USA

2. **Mr P Maskey** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on his recent visit to the USA. (AQO 254/11)

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

I made an official visit to New York from 19 September to 24 September 2010 to promote Northern Ireland's multi-skilled workforce in the United States and to encourage greater educational exchange opportunities between Northern Ireland's universities and further education colleges and those in the US.

My programme of events included meetings with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation; the New York City Council Speaker, Christine Quinn; the Commissioner of the New York City Department of Small Business Services, Rob Walsh, who is responsible for workforce development; and Loretta Brennan Glucksman from the American Ireland Fund. I also attended the annual Irish American Wall Street 50 awards ceremony as a guest of Declan Kelly, the US economic envoy to Northern Ireland, and the Clinton Global Initiative as a guest of former President Clinton.

Mr P Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answer. I would be grateful if he would go into more detail about how his trip will assist people to get back into employment. Were there any opportunities to discuss that when he was in America, because, in the current economic climate, it is very important that such topics are discussed in such a forum?

The Minister for Employment and Learning: I shall deal with two issues that might answer

the Member's question directly. We had a very positive meeting with Speaker Christine Quinn and the City University of New York. Members may be aware that, last year, I appointed Lidija Smirnov to represent the interests of the Department in the Northern Ireland Bureau in Washington DC. Ms Smirnov reports to the bureau but works specifically on developing links between institutions in the United States and here. We agreed with Speaker Quinn and the City University of New York that she will take forward a proposal to develop links with our universities, and I believe that that is coming. We agreed in principle that it should happen, and officials have been appointed to take the work forward.

I mentioned that I spoke to the Commissioner of the New York City Department of Small Business Services, Rob Walsh. We had a very positive meeting, during which we saw a lot of the programmes that he and the New York City Council have followed up. We visited locations in the city where they operate, and he later put some very positive responses to our meeting on his website. Indeed, I am sure that the Member is familiar with the 'From the Balcony, A Publisher's Blog' website. If he cares to look at the entry for Saturday 25 September, he will see copious notes that describe the "special visit and dynamic exchange" that we had with the commissioner. Even in a city like New York, job creation and dealing with people who are looking for work is proving to be very difficult. Indeed, Rob Walsh sent an e-mail round his department on the day that we met, recommending that his officials visit my Department's website. We believe that we have established good contacts there, and we will follow up on them.

Although the Americans have some excellent methods, we were able to bring just as many good ideas to them. When visiting the United States or anywhere else, we should not think of ourselves as underdogs; we can produce good ideas, we have some excellent further and higher education people of whom we can be proud, and we have some excellent job-creation opportunities and processes. I am hopeful that the visit will result in positive outcomes. At the very least, a formal institutional link has been established between one of our universities and the City University of New York.

Mr Beggs: Given our historic connections, mutual values and the potential for investment, does the Minister agree that Ministers and Departments

should lobby robustly in the United States to bring investment and jobs to Northern Ireland?

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

I omitted to say that I visited the Titanic exhibition that was held in Grand Central Terminal, at which people from Tourism Ireland were promoting Northern Ireland tourism.

3.15 pm

Indeed, I was very proud to see Belfast and other parts of Northern Ireland represented in that great cathedral of a station. There was live music and a mock-up of the Titanic, and Northern Ireland was being promoted as a destination. I think that tourism is one of the ways through which economic growth can be delivered. We have shown that we have a saleable product, and we now have a direct air link between Belfast and Newark, which is adjacent to New York. There is every reason to believe that we should grow those links.

The Member referred to what might be called diaspora issues. I note that Invest Northern Ireland and the two universities have appointed a representative to promote those issues. That person took office on 1 October as a diaspora co-ordinator, as it were. I think that the combination of that work and the work that we are doing with Invest NI and other Departments will prove fruitful. I should point out that other regions of Europe would give their right arm for the entrée into some of the places of business and government in the United States to which we have gained access.

Universities: Accessibility

3. **Mr McDevitt** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, in light of the current considerations on funding for universities, if he can provide an assurance that university education will continue to be accessible and affordable to people from all economic backgrounds. (AQO 255/11)

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

Since 2000, my Department has been addressing the issue of fair access to higher education through a number of policy initiatives and a range of specific funding mechanisms. With almost 50% of 18-year-olds leaving school going to university, Northern Ireland now has the highest participation rate of university students of any area of the United Kingdom. In 2008-09, when that rate was at 41.7%, we

had the highest participation rate of students from disadvantaged backgrounds and economic classes 4 to 7. That compares with 32.4% in England and 28.2% in Scotland.

The existing fees regime has, so far, not impacted adversely on our participation rates. Nevertheless, there remain some stubborn pockets of under-representation in sections of the population. That is why my Department is leading the development of a new integrated regional strategy for widening participation in higher education. Fair access to higher education is an economic, as well as a social, equality imperative. The implementation of the new Widening Participation strategy will be a key element in ensuring that university education will continue to be accessible and affordable to people from all economic backgrounds.

Mr McDevitt: Does the Minister agree that access to university should be based solely on one's ability to learn and never on one's ability to pay? Will he assure the House that there will be no increase in university fees in this region in the months and years ahead and that student loans will remain available and affordable at rates that young workers pay back?

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

In answer to the Member's first point, I believe that, in these islands, we have an unbeatable record in participation rates in higher education of people from socially disadvantaged backgrounds. No one has achieved what we have achieved. One of the reasons for that is that we have set out, as a fundamental policy objective, to achieve something. Indeed, one section of my Department is devoted to precisely that.

However, even though we have those high rates, I did not feel that all aspects of disadvantage had been addressed, and stubborn pockets of under-representation remain. I had a discussion with the lead official less than two weeks ago about that issue, and we have work to do. Indeed, the Widening Participation strategy document will be made available shortly to Members.

The Member knows that it is my intention to make a statement on fees to the House tomorrow morning. If he was trying to get in early and anticipate that statement, I am afraid that he will have to leave it. We will return to that issue tomorrow, and we will return specifically to the outcome of the Browne review, which has been widely trailed. However, the

detail of that review will not be available until tomorrow. Our ability to respond in Northern Ireland depends on a range of issues, including what Revenue and Customs is prepared to do. That will have a big impact on the repayment of loans. It has indicated heretofore that it is not prepared to single us out and to treat taxpayers here differently from those in other parts of the UK. We will return to those issues tomorrow and, I suspect, in the days ahead. However, I may be wrong about that.

Mr Bell: The Minister correctly outlined that Northern Ireland led the way for the United Kingdom in ensuring that children from working-class backgrounds, such as me, got to university. Without pre-empting tomorrow's statement, is it not important that we maintain a balanced approach whereby our universities can remain competitive but, at the same time, ensure that we have a richly educated population as opposed to reverting to the old days of the educated rich?

The Minister for Employment and Learning: I agree entirely with the Member. That is my personal view. I also draw Members' attention to a fact that sometimes gets lost in the debate: in the past five years, my Department significantly increased its funding to universities by 21%. Since fees were introduced, all of the resulting income, a combined total of £80 million a year, has gone directly to the two universities. On top of that, the universities have successfully and properly increased the flow of cash from the private sector and philanthropic sources. Therefore, higher education has been treated extremely favourably in Northern Ireland and rightly so. Indeed, it is our intention to ensure that our universities remain competitive. However, there is no point in having universities if people cannot get into and benefit from them. My general approach is that which the Member set out.

Mr B McCrea: The Minister mentioned that he had talked to a lead official about the existing programmes to widen participation in higher education. Perhaps he would comment on the impact of those programmes and outline what might be done in future.

The Minister for Employment and Learning: The general picture is positive, but there are some negatives. The pattern is that university students from socially and economically deprived backgrounds tend to have higher

dropout rates than those from other backgrounds. We are raising that issue with the universities. It is my understanding that we provide the universities with specific funding to help them to deal with that problem. However, I have been somewhat disappointed that the dropout rates have not fallen to a greater extent. If those rates do not start to come down, we may, as part of future arrangements, have to introduce penalties.

Some issues remain outstanding. Certain pockets of people in the community do not avail themselves of higher education. In the coming months, the widening access strategy will address those groups. Although we have a good record and much to be proud of, there is unfinished business.

Ms Lo: Without probing too much on the Minister's statement tomorrow, I want to ask him about the review that he commissioned, namely Joanne Stuart's review on tuition fees, which has still not been published. Does he intend to publish that shortly, and will he reconcile its findings with the imminent report from Lord Browne?

The Minister for Employment and Learning: Yes. The report will be published shortly, whether that is tomorrow or in a few days. There are some logistical issues, but it will be published very shortly. There will be differences between the two reports, but we must remember that university funding is a devolved matter. We must look at the circumstances in Northern Ireland. The Executive will have to prioritise resources, and my Department can spend resources only if it receives them. As the Member knows, there are other competing demands, such as health, education, and so forth.

We must also remember that the Stuart review was completed in the spring before the worst of what happened became apparent. Therefore, there will be differences. However, the Assembly must determine its priorities. That is what devolution is about, and we will collectively have to put our money where our mouth is. If we want to go ahead with one option, we will have to say that we do not want something else, or vice versa.

We will have that debate, and I hope that we will start it tomorrow when we see the details in the Browne review. As I said to the Chairperson of the Committee, we will make the Stuart report available as soon as possible.

DEL: Budget

5. **Mr Gardiner** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning if he will seek to protect the economy-facing aspects of his Department in the forthcoming public expenditure round. (AQO 257/11)

10. **Dr McDonnell** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of the potential impact of any future cuts on his Department's various business support programmes. (AQO 262/11)

15. **Mr McClarty** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of the importance of the Assured Skills programme in attracting foreign direct investment. (AQO 267/11)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: With your permission, Mr Speaker, I will answer questions 5, 10 and 15 together.

Growing the economy is the central plank of the Programme for Government, and my Department's work in supporting local business is critical to the success of our economic strategy. I recognise fully the value of the economy-facing aspects of the work that is being done by my Department, and I wish to protect and, ideally, expand that work over the Budget 2010 period. However, that decision is dependent on the future resources that are made available to DEL from the Assembly.

The number one priority is growing a dynamic economy, and DEL is responsible for a range of measures associated with alleviating the harsher effects of the economic downturn. Clearly, any reduction of the skills budget will have an adverse impact on the Executive's response to the downturn. I continue to prioritise that work through the funding of important programmes such as that of providing qualifications in business improvement techniques to local manufacturing and management and leadership courses. Since 2009, departmental funding has enabled over 1,400 individual managers and over 300 companies to improve their leadership and management practice, and the feedback to date has been extremely positive.

Mr Gardiner: To what extent is investment in skills essential if Northern Ireland is to emerge from the recession?

The Minister for Employment and Learning: It is absolutely critical and essential. Another example of our work is a programme called Assured Skills, which we hope to have completed and ready for next week's economic conference in the United States on which we have been working closely with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and Invest NI. Yes — shock, horror — we do work together from time to time. We have been working closely on those matters and have taken a joined-up approach.

It is clear from talking to any potential indigenous or inward investor that the skills agenda will be the main issue in the future. As Members will probably be aware, the ability of Invest NI to deliver selective financial assistance will be on a diminishing scale from now on due to European regulations, so there will be fewer opportunities for Invest NI to give the employment and capital grants that it used to give in the past. Therefore, skills will be the future in determining whether we attract and encourage future investment.

Dr McDonnell: I thank the Minister for his answers so far. He said that he has had discussions in which he has co-operated fully with DETI. What discussions has he had about the various business development programmes that are being run in parallel and delivered by the Department for Employment and Learning and DETI?

The Minister for Employment and Learning: Officials meet regularly and work those things out together. There is a much closer working relationship in dealing with individual companies. As the Member may be aware, last week, I attended a meeting with a significant potential investor. Both Minister Foster and I were present, as were officials from my Department, Invest NI and DETI. That heralds a new approach, which I know the Member will support.

At the end of the day, we are a small place, and, when we deal with those investors, they are not interested in meeting a plethora of Departments and organisations. They want to talk to people who can deliver what they want. As the Member will also be aware, we are happy to do bespoke training for individual companies should that be necessary. Knowing his approach to such matters as I do, I am satisfied that what is now happening will meet fully with his support and approval.

3.30 pm

Private Members' Business

Public Sector Recruitment

Debate resumed on motion:

That this Assembly notes the importance of ensuring that public sector recruitment is based on the merit principle; acknowledges that there are still areas of the public sector where under-representation of certain communities appears to be worsening; further notes the ongoing problems associated with recruitment to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive; and calls on the Minister of Finance and Personnel to take further measures to ensure that recruitment in the public sector is more broadly reflective of the working-age population. — [Mr Campbell.]

Mr Gallagher: I want to say at the outset that the SDLP welcomes this debate. As one of our Members who spoke previously said, we believe very much in the principle that the person best qualified for a post should be appointed, and that goes for all employees.

Earlier, Dr Farry said that this was the same old debate and that the two sides of the House were just quoting statistics to each other. For those of us from the nationalist community, it is not that simple. I do not want to rake up everything from the past, but facts are facts. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. Allow the Member to continue.

Mr Gallagher: In the past, there were serious abuses in relation to the appointment of Catholics. Much has been done to correct that, but it is still a work in progress, and concerns remain among the nationalist community about employment issues.

As I said, I welcome the debate. I note that this is not the first time that Gregory Campbell has brought a motion to the House that has provided us the opportunity to discuss equality issues. I refer particularly to a motion about Civil Service recruitment that Mr Campbell brought forward on 21 September 2009. That motion stressed the need for action to be taken so that those from all community backgrounds could have confidence in the recruitment process. I am sure that nobody in the House disagrees with that sentiment. However, during that debate,

there was a division on an SDLP amendment that the House subsequently did not accept. Our amendment drew attention to the need to sustain and progress the achievements that had been made to address the historic imbalances throughout the Civil Service workforce. I said something about that earlier. The SDLP amendment also recognised the continued need for a specific focus on encouraging religious and gender equality and ethnic diversity in the Civil Service and beyond and, importantly, in the Senior Civil Service. Therefore, Mr Campbell might reflect on whether it would have been better to support the SDLP amendment in that debate some 13 months ago, rather than putting forward the motion today.

However, as I said, today's debate is welcome and so is the fact that it is a wider debate that covers the whole of the public sector. OFMDFM's 'Public Appointments Annual Report 2008/2009' from the central appointments unit contained a table outlining the total percentage of chairpersons appointed by gender, remuneration and community up to March 2009. It is noteworthy that of the senior appointments, only 31% of those appointed were Catholic and only 19% were female. Bearing that in mind, I echo Mr Campbell's call to the Minister of Finance and Personnel to take further steps to ensure that recruitment in the public sector is more broadly reflective of the working-age population. Perhaps Mr Campbell and Lord Morrow, whose names are attached to the motion, would like to join me in taking that scrutiny a stage further and widening the debate to employment right across Northern Ireland.

In 2006, the Committee on the Administration of Justice produced a report entitled 'Equality in Northern Ireland: the rhetoric and the reality'. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. Allow the Member to continue.

Mr Gallagher: That was long before the current downturn —

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

Mr Gallagher: To finish, I encourage Mr Campbell to revisit the Good Friday Agreement and to ensure that what is laid down there is put into practice.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I am in favour of the motion,

although I do not agree with everything that the proposers have said so far.

With regard to statements that there was not systematic discrimination against Catholics in this state and this community, of course there was. Some of us have to wake up to that reality. We have to learn from the mistakes of the past. Those mistakes and those policies should not be repeated against any section of the community ever again.

Mr Campbell: They are.

Mr McKay: Things are moving on, and if you listen a wee minute, Gregory, I will explain the point.

From 2001 to 2008, the Catholic composition of the Six-County workforce increased by 4·9% from 40·3% to 45·2%. By comparison, the Protestant composition at 2008 was 54·8%. The 2007 labour force survey (LFS) religion report estimated that the Catholic share of the economically active lies between 44·1% and 47·7%. Various factors that caused those demographic changes need to be taken into account. The Member for East Antrim Roy Beggs referred to the high level of Protestant workers retiring at one end of the scale, and that is an issue in the Housing Executive. At the other end of the scale, there is a higher proportion of Catholics coming through at working age, which has led to much of the demographical change.

Affirmative action is needed to create a level playing field, and public bodies and, especially, private sector companies should adopt those where necessary. We need to look beyond total compositional figures as representation at different levels and grades of organisations needs to be addressed in certain sectors. My party colleague Martina Anderson referred to the Civil Service and the fact that at grade 5 and above, a third was Catholic and a quarter was women. Those are glaring statistics.

A 2008 monitoring report outlined a number of clear figures. My constituency colleague Declan O'Loan referred to the Fire and Rescue Service board, which has a significant workforce of 2,119, with 61·6% Protestant and 38·4% Catholic. The proposer of the motion referred to the Housing Executive, which is 59·9% Catholic and 46·1% Protestant. NI Railways is 69·6% Protestant and 30·4% Catholic. There needs to be affirmative action, not just from large employers in the public sector but from the

private sector. Inequalities of any scale need to be acted on across the board.

Employment monitoring is important, and we must ensure that we act on any information that shows that people are overlooked for jobs because of race, religion, sexual orientation, gender, age, disability or political opinion. It is also important to take into account the figures for those who are economically inactive and who want and seek work. Last year, an LFS report highlighted the fact that there were still twice as many Catholics — 31,000 — than there were Protestants who were economically inactive and who wanted work.

Significant shifts are also taking place in communities. We should take cognisance of the fact that working-class Protestants are becoming more vulnerable to unemployment because of the demise of many of the traditional industries that employed them. Although inequalities between Protestants and Catholics are narrowing, we are witnessing a high proportion of people from across society being left behind, and that is borne out by the large number of unemployed and economically inactive people in communities of highest deprivation.

To conclude, I agree that there are still areas of the public sector where under-representation of communities needs to be fundamentally addressed. We want to see a balanced workforce, and we want to ensure that the progress that we have seen in addressing those inequalities in employment is built on further. Equality, of course, does not threaten anybody.

Mr Bell: The reality of Northern Ireland in the twenty-first century is that if Protestants were to stand accused of having genuine equality in recruitment, there would not be enough evidence to convict them. The record is clear and quite shameful: in matters of recruitment, which the SDLP and Sinn Féin have skirted around, the balance against the Protestant community is clear and present, and it is a danger to employment relations. That is why change is necessary now.

Some Members from Sinn Féin and the SDLP quoted figures and talked about discrimination. Of course, they did not mention the flood of emigrants who crossed into Northern Ireland from the Republic of Ireland in the decades after it came into existence from the 1920s. Those figures were ignored. With respect, I will never take lectures from Sinn Féin on discrimination

when that party has yet to apologise for the republican movement taking a single mother of 10, stripping her, torturing her, murdering her and leaving her on the side. That is the big discrimination question that that party has yet to tackle.

The reality is that even the bodies in Northern Ireland that are tasked with the promotion of human rights and equality — the Equality Commission and the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission — cannot advocate their current practice or stand as exemplars of good practice to the Protestant community. Indeed, I raised that issue when I was a member of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission. In those respects, it is a case of, "Physician, heal thyself."

Mr O'Loan: The Equality Commission compiled the figures that we are debating. Does the Member agree that that body is the first and only employer in Northern Ireland to offer free and independent training to Protestant applicants to increase their likelihood of obtaining jobs with the commission, and that that is a very significant form of affirmative action? Does he not consider that the negativity of his party towards the Equality Commission, which is reflected in his speech, may disincline members of the Protestant community to seek employment with it?

Mr Bell: I always welcome an intervention from "himself" O'Loan. However, he skirted around the fact that, although the Equality Commission may be putting on a good training programme — fair play to it if it is — the reality is that that is not working in its own organisation. That is the elephant in the room. It is not working for the Equality Commission or the Human Rights Commission, and the Protestant community is being disadvantaged. However, that is going to change and I welcome the fact that there was cross-community support for that change today. Members have got to get it. The figures are clear on the Housing Executive, with 36.6% of the workforce from the Protestant community in 2004, and 33.7% in 2009. What part of discrimination against Protestants do they not understand? They must get it.

As for the police, the shameful 50:50 recruitment process that was brought in by Ken Maginnis of the Ulster Unionist Party was wrong when that party brought it in, it is wrong today, and it will be wrong every day until 2011. Mr O'Loan argued that negative comments stop

people joining the Equality Commission, yet those negative comments were not applied to the police. The 50:50 requirement is a systematic bar, because it says to young men and women, some of whom are constituents of mine in Strangford, that they have the ability, the skill set, the education, the physical fitness and everything that is necessary to be excellent police officers in our society, bar the fact that they are Protestants. That is the shame that Members from the Ulster Unionist Party, which brought it in, and Members from the SDLP and Sinn Féin, which ensured that it was kept in, will have to live with.

Mr Beggs: Will the Member give way?

Mr Bell: I am sorry —

Mr Beggs: Lies, lies, lies.

Mr Bell: I am sorry — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. Allow the Member to continue.

Mr Bell: I will not give way, because the Ulster Unionists have given enough away. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

3.45 pm

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. If I heard the Member for East Antrim right, he accused the Member for Strangford of being a liar; not once, but four times. Perhaps he should be asked to withdraw that remark before proceedings continue.

Mr Speaker: I was not exactly listening to the Member, but I ask him to reflect on what he said.

Mr Beggs: I will reflect on what I said. If the record is examined closely, the Ulster Unionist Party's view was very clear, and — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. I ask the Member to take his seat. That is not what I asked the Member to do; I asked him to reflect on a comment that he made earlier.

Mr Beggs: Reflecting parliamentary language, the Member is being extremely diplomatic with the truth.

Mr Speaker: Order. Let me read the Hansard report and come back either to the Member directly or to the House on exactly what was said. I ask the Member to continue.

Mr Beggs: I am happy to withdraw what I said, but I indicate clearly that the Member is being extremely diplomatic with the truth. In saying what I am saying, I am reflecting parliamentary language.

Mr Bell: I accept the Member's withdrawal. Unfortunately, I cannot withdraw what Ken Maginnis did to numerous Protestants in my community, who were systematically discriminated against by the 50:50 recruitment policy. It is not undiplomatic to say that that was wrong when Ken Maginnis introduced it and that it will be wrong every day until 2011.

We are not talking in the past tense — oh that we were reflecting on an historical base. The motion is worded in the present tense, which makes the situation all the more shameful. We are reflecting on 20,000 posts in the general grades of the Civil Service that are not reflective of the Protestant population of Northern Ireland. That fact should leave many people not only with significant questions about the reasons for the under-representation of Protestants in the Civil Service but about what will be done about it.

In supporting the motion, we must change employment patterns in Northern Ireland.

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Mr Bell: In the Housing Executive and the Civil Service, all members are equal, but, for Protestants, some seem more equal than others.

Ms J McCann: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I wish that I could say that I am delighted to take part in the debate. However —

Lord Morrow: *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Ms J McCann: From what I have heard so far, I have to say that I do not understand what exactly we are debating.

As in any working sector, recruitment to the public sector should be made on merit. However, when a sector is not representative of the society or community that it comes from, there can be times when affirmative action should be taken to ensure that people's equality of access to, and opportunities for, employment are adhered to.

I have listened to statistics being quoted back and forward, but we must look at the Civil Service equality statistics, which were

published in January. They show that there is a higher percentage of women in the full-time workforce — 60·8% — but a very low representation at more senior levels of the Civil Service. The statistics show in black and white that there is a similar pattern for those from particular community backgrounds. The Catholic community is represented less at the higher level than at lower grades, but I have not heard anyone from the DUP complain about that discrimination.

Family considerations must be taken into account in promotions to higher grades, because women find it difficult in that respect. We should argue for workplaces in the Civil Service and the public service to be made more accessible for women; they should be able to work nearer to home, for instance, given the shared work space.

We should be talking about new ways of thinking about work and about how to incorporate family life. We should be debating equality for everybody. If discrimination exists anywhere, it should be challenged. I do not think that anyone argues against that, but discrimination must be challenged in a balanced and even way. The sectarian remarks from the party opposite do no justice to that principle.

The public sector can show leadership on the issue. We must also look at discrimination against people with disabilities or from ethnic minorities. We must consider the issue in a rounded way, not in a purely sectarian manner.

As my party colleagues and other Members said, we want recruitment in the public sector to reflect the working-age population to a greater extent, but that does not go far enough. As my colleague Daithí McKay said, we must also look at people who are economically inactive.

As I was listening to Question Time before I came into the Chamber, I heard that high levels of young people still leave school with no academic qualifications, without which it is difficult to get into the public sector. Therefore, perhaps we should make it easier for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, for instance, to be recruited to the public sector.

I would rather that we were having a more holistic debate on equality and not concentrating on one area. We should be looking at equality for people with and without disabilities, equality for people from ethnic minorities and gender equality. Inroads have

been made here, but people must remember that equality is for everyone, not just for one section of the community.

Mr Speaker: Before I call the Minister, I ask Members once again to temper their language, please. Some of the debate falls far short of good standards in the Assembly.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I hope that that is not a warning to me, Mr Speaker. I do not know where the standard will go when I start participating.

I will make a few observations on the debate. First, my views on the bloated equality industry in Northern Ireland are well known, and I hope that one possible outcome of the unfortunate financial circumstances that we will face over the next number of years is that we will look more closely at all the apparatus that has been put in place.

The debate illustrated some of the points that I want to make. Members threw figures backward and forward across the Chamber this afternoon, but all that information comes at a cost. It might be said that such information is worthwhile if it helps to identify the problem, satisfy people that the problem is being addressed and sort out the problem. However, the truth of the matter is that people are selective. As we have seen today, people choose the bits of information that they like, ignore the bits that they do not like, and, in the meantime, the public purse bears the cost.

Every year, equality monitoring in my Department alone costs £200,000. Do not forget that equality monitoring extends across all Departments, the Equality Commission and all the other bodies that go with it. The first question that people must ask themselves is whether that is how they wish to spend resources in times of economic austerity. Is that the priority that we should set, especially as it is clear that people on that side of the House or this side of the House will not be satisfied? My first observation, therefore, is that all the figures of the day will not necessarily address the problem.

My second observation is this; I agree with the first part of the motion. It is important that public sector recruitment, and, indeed, recruitment in any sector, is based solely on the merit principle. I am advised by officials every day. People come and give me papers, information, et cetera. I do not really give a toss which church they go to on a Sunday. However, I am concerned about

whether they give me sound advice and the information that I want and whether they understand the issues that are involved in the Department. Their religion is immaterial to me. I want quality advice from people who can do the job, who are enthusiastic, and who will serve the Department well. As far as I am concerned, those are the only qualifications that count. If we concentrate on those, much of what Members have mentioned in the debate becomes less important.

Let us have a reality check. If there is imbalance in some Departments, which has been oft-quoted in the debate, the only way to solve it is, usually, to recruit more people or wait until vacancies arise. People cannot be sacked because there are too many Catholics or too many Protestants. Some Departments already have recruitment freezes, and during the next number of years, there will not be the opportunity to recruit, let alone recruit on the basis of trying to resolve some perceived imbalance or discrimination. In fact, in one or two years' time, the Assembly might be happy that there is any recruitment, full stop, rather than dwelling on the group from which people are recruited.

My third observation is that my Department is not, of course, responsible for all the recruitment mentioned in the motion. By the way, that is not a Pontius Pilate act of mine. I suggest to the proposer of the motion that if he is deeply concerned about the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, perhaps, the Minister for Social Development would love to come to the Dispatch Box to talk about that issue at some stage. As we are aware, the Minister for Social Development is extremely concerned about imbalances. I served alongside him on the Policing Board, when he waxed lyrical about imbalance in the Police Service and what should be done about it. I am sure that he will bring the same vigour and determination to the job of the Housing Executive. It would be useful to get his reaction on that.

Let me deal with the Department of Finance and Personnel. Like all public sector organisations, my Department has a duty, which it fulfils and which costs it a fair amount of money every year, to monitor and carry out regular reviews of the workforce and submit annual returns to the Equality Commission under the Fair Employment and Treatment (Northern Ireland) Order 1998. My Department must review its employment

practices and policies, and, where it finds a lack of fair participation or imbalance, it is required to take steps to address the problem.

The Department usually does that — and here is the irony — through discussion with the Equality Commission. Mr Speaker, you will realise the difficulty that that causes because I must point out that that is the same Equality Commission whose Protestant employment was 43·4% in 2001, when the Protestant make-up of the workforce was 56·7%. Eight years later, startlingly good progress had been made: the Protestant composition of the body to which my Department is required to submit returns and to enter into discussion with to deal with recruitment imbalance had fallen to 34·8%.

Mr Speaker, you will see the difficulty that we face. We go to a body for advice on how we might deal with those imbalances, but, since it cannot sort out its own house, its advice might be rather suspect. How on earth can we go to it for advice to get our house sorted out? That is one of the ironies. We all know that employment practices, politics and all of that kind of thing in Northern Ireland are peppered with ironies, and that is another example of such ironies.

4.00 pm

I know that Mr O'Loan would say that it is like that because of the attitudes of people such as me. That is the point that he has made. That is despite the fact that, over the years, when the SDLP was trailing the name of the RUC and the police through the mud, he never thought that that may have contributed to Catholics not wanting to join the police. There was always some other reason for that reluctance. However, I digress, and I do not want to get down that route. I was trying to provoke him into an intervention, but he has not been provoked. Pardon me, he has; very good.

Mr O'Loan: There is a phrase about giving a person enough rope to hang themselves. I did not intervene earlier because I wanted to hear what the Minister would say. He has conveyed the tone of his speech at some length now. Although there is an amount of levity about what we say, I am shocked to listen to an Executive Minister speaking in the terms in which this Minister is speaking. He talks about a bloated equality industry. By saying that all the figures of the day do not address the problem, he is rejecting the mechanisms that we have used — the mechanisms of fair employment law and

the monitoring of workforces. He says that, in the future, we might be happy to be recruiting at all and not be concerned about such issues as the merit principle in employment practice. He is telling us that the advice of the Equality Commission, which is a body established under statute, is rather suspect. For a Minister of the Executive to be saying those things is very serious and should cause considerable concern.

Mr Speaker: Order. The Minister gave way. I have continually said in the House that the good practice of interventions is that they should be sharp, short and to the point.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I regret doing that; I will not do that again. That was not an intervention; it was a speech. Despite all of the reservations that I have about the bloated equality industry in Northern Ireland — I repeat that phrase, because I do not feel ashamed in any way about saying it — and about the ability of the Equality Commission or any other commission to sort out the imbalances that exist, recruitment in the Civil Service is broadly reflective of the working population. People will seek out imbalances. Do not forget that so far in this debate, once people have accepted that a balance has been struck in one place, they have looked for an imbalance somewhere else, because they have to find some reason to complain about equality issues.

The Northern Ireland Civil Service, which is the only part for which I can answer, is a big recruiter. In 2008, we recruited 1,913 people. That recruitment was broadly reflective of the working population. Some 53·1% of those recruited were Protestant and 46·9% were Catholic. Overall, 55% of those employed by the Northern Ireland Civil Service are Protestant and 45% are Catholic. That, again, is broadly reflective of the population. The numbers at the top end are fairly reflective as well. Some 55% of those in grade 5 positions and above are Protestant. I hope that those figures show that the Northern Ireland Civil Service broadly reflects what happens in the general population. I do not know whether it is deliberate or accidental or whether, given the size of our workforce, we can be broadly reflective in that way.

The one thing that I would resist is if I thought that figures and recruitment were being manipulated to reach an artificial balance; I would be the first to condemn that. Although we

have such figures, I hope that they are purely reflective of a policy that recruits people on merit.

The debate has shown that even genuine concerns can lead to one side accusing the other. Mitchel McLaughlin spoke about how Sinn Féin broadly supports the motion, and then we got a tirade about the past. In fact, every Sinn Féin Member gave us that. It is an opportunity for the most oppressed people ever (MOPEs) to wash their linen in public. They refer to the discrimination of the past. Mr O'Loan started by saying that the public sector is broadly reflective and then gave us a list the length of your arm of areas where it is not broadly reflective. That is the problem with a debate like this.

As far as the Northern Ireland Civil Service — and my responsibility as Minister — is concerned, I hope that I have made it clear today that the one piece of guidance that I would offer every recruitment exercise is that when people come forward they should not be judged on their religion, colour, or background but on whether they can fill the post effectively. That should be the basis of any recruitment, and if recruitment panels deviate from that, they should be called to account. The figures for the Northern Ireland Civil Service show that, by and large, given the numbers — and I think that it probably is because of the numbers — recruitment is reflective of society.

Mr Speaker: Will the Minister bring his remarks to a close?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I will bring my remarks to a close now. Given the situation into which we are moving, we have to ask ourselves whether that is how we want to spend resources and whether we can sort the problem out by recruitment.

Lord Morrow: This has been a very useful debate. Many figures have been bandied to and fro across the Chamber, some accurate, some downright inaccurate, and some very unhelpful. However, the sum and substance of the debate has been useful. Some Members wanted to take the debate back to the 1980s and some wanted to go back to the 1960s, but I could take you back to partition itself, where this all started.

I would like Mr O'Loan in particular to reflect, because he comes off with some wonderful stuff. Indeed, he is the same Mr O'Loan who, quite recently, was put into a wee anteroom — a

naughty box — by his party because he came up with the bright idea that Sinn Féin and the SDLP should form a pan-nationalist front. He made that suggestion to the utter embarrassment of his new leader, and, I suspect, of his party, although some of them were strangely silent and neither backed him nor spoke out against him, so they may not have made up their minds yet. He not only embarrassed himself, he castigated his own party. He wants to form a link with Sinn Féin because he says that that is a wonderful way forward; they will form a pan-nationalist front and down those unionists. Perish the thought.

He then castigated Gregory Campbell and me for having the audacity to bring such a motion to the House. He used wonderful words, but perhaps he should reflect a wee while. I see that some of you want to go back to the 1960s. Go further back, however, and look at the trends in the 1920s, because I know that you are a man who is interested in history: your own history, that is.

When there was partition in this country, what had we? We had a population in the South of Ireland that was 12% Protestant, and the Catholic population here in Northern Ireland was 20%. What is the population like today? In the South of Ireland, the Protestant population is 2%. Well, that is just generational, isn't it? Over here in the North, where all the discrimination allegedly goes on, the Catholic community has increased to over 40%. So, you just wonder whether Mr O'Loan has really tackled the problem.

I am glad also to see Mr Attwood here. I recognise that Mr Attwood is a very busy man. He is a Minister, and I understand that it was not possible for him to be here for all of the debate. I have no doubt that he will consult Hansard tomorrow, because the Housing Executive just happens to be under his wing. Who better could it fall to than a man who has been prancing up and down for years about the police, inequality, recruitment, everything, and has got himself into a state of depression. However, he is not getting himself into any state of depression about the Housing Executive figures. Oh, not at all. He seems to be able to smile his way through them.

We have a challenge for Mr Attwood. When you go home tonight, get a hold of Hansard and take a good read of it, because there are some interesting figures there for you to have a wee

mull over. I have no doubt that you will want to come back to this House very soon, and say: "Look, there is a problem here, and, as a fair-minded Minister, I will address it". We look forward to that, and that is a wee challenge that goes out from this debate to you, Mr Attwood.

Mr Gallagher at least said, and I think that he was genuine, that the SDLP wanted to see fairness and agreed with the merit principle. I think that you said that, and that is genuinely welcome. It is just a pity that you stopped there and did not put a wee bit more to it. I suspect that that was an omission on your part and not something that you did genuinely. However, I want you, too, to reflect on the 50:50 PSNI recruitment, which Mr Beggs got into a tizzy about and got himself all worked up because Jonathan Bell said something. Why do you get so worked up about the discrimination, as you call it, or the imbalance in the number of police recruits but do not have the same urgency about other Departments? You will have to explain that some day, because in all the facts and figures that were bandied about —

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

Lord Morrow: Yes, I am trying to do that, Mr Speaker, but I am being distracted. *[Laughter.]*

In all the facts and figures that were bandied about, that was not mentioned.

Let me say sincerely to Sinn Féin: if Sinn Féin has changed its ways and wants unionists to start to take it seriously, it should stop putting up Martina Anderson as a spokesperson on equality, because we are acutely aware of what Miss Anderson's past was like, and she is the last person in this Assembly to come in here and lecture unionists about equality, fairness and equity. No, Miss Anderson, we are not taking it from you, thank you very much.

As for Mr McKay — *[Laughter.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. Allow the Member to continue.

Lord Morrow: Thank you. Mr McKay comes into this House as if he was born yesterday. Where, Mr McKay, do you live? What planet have you been on for the past what number of years? I do not know what age you are.

Mr Cobain: He is 24.

Lord Morrow: He is a bit over, but he looks like it anyway.

Mr Speaker: Order.

Lord Morrow: Mr McKay, you will have to do a bit more homework before you come in here lecturing anybody about discrimination.

Jennifer McCann said that she regretted having to take part in the debate. I regretted that you took part, too, when I heard what you said. *[Laughter.]* You are another one who does not seem to want to face any facts.

Mr Speaker: Order.

4.15 pm

Lord Morrow: Mr Speaker, we have a raft of people right around this Chamber today who will do anything but face facts. They will talk about police discrimination and bigotry, but when it comes down to facts, facts do not exist.

Mr Campbell: I thank the Member for giving way. Does the Member agree that although it was a welcome debate, part of the problem is that, as an overriding concern, it appears from all the figures, whoever bandies them about, that where there is under-representation of the Catholic community, things are improving; where there is under-representation of the Protestant community, things are not improving. That reality cannot seem to dawn on the minds of the Member for North Antrim — either Member for North Antrim — of either pan-nationalist front for some reason.

Lord Morrow: That point is well made; I am glad that I allowed Mr Campbell to intervene and make that point. This motion is, in fact, dealing with recruitment; it is not dealing with employment. I and the proposer of the motion acknowledged that if there is a pattern, it just cannot be changed overnight. Therefore, we are talking about recruitment.

I remember that, about five years ago, the Housing Executive got exercised about the issue of imbalance. It called a meeting in Omagh and said that it had a concern about imbalance. I suspect that a number of representatives here were at that meeting. I asked the question, "Did you initiate this meeting, or were you prompted to do it?" The Housing Executive had to admit that the fair employment agency had pointed out to it that there was an imbalance that it had to address. Would it not have been much more

encouraging to the Protestant community if the Housing Executive had initiated that meeting of its own volition, without having to be prompted by the fair employment agency?

But then, let us look at the fair employment agency. The Minister made reference to it, which I think was very apt — irrespective, Mr O’Loan, of what you might think of the Minister’s comments. We have a fair employment agency that is supposed to be looking after and monitoring employment patterns in Northern Ireland. Does anyone in this Assembly remember the time when we used to hear said: “a Protestant police force”? Was that ever said? We now have the Equality Commission — it was the fair employment agency then, I think — which is an organisation with a gross imbalance in its own figures, and it is steadily —

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

Lord Morrow: Yes, I will.

It is steadily getting worse.

Mr Gallagher: Will the Member give way?

Lord Morrow: Right, OK.

Mr Gallagher: Mr Speaker, I want to —

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member’s time is up.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly notes the importance of ensuring that public sector recruitment is based on the merit principle; acknowledges that there are still areas of the public sector where under-representation of certain communities appears to be worsening; further notes the ongoing problems associated with recruitment to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive; and calls on the Minister of Finance and Personnel to take further measures to ensure that recruitment in the public sector is more broadly reflective of the working-age population.

Disappeared Victims

Mr Speaker: I remind Members that they have a general duty to behave responsibly — *[Interruption.]* Order.

Mr McDevitt: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I would appreciate a ruling on the term “pan-nationalist front”. Mr Campbell referred to Sinn Féin and the SDLP in a collective sense as the “pan-nationalist front” some moments ago in the Chamber. Is this appropriate, Mr Speaker? Does such an organisation exist, and is it appropriate for Members to refer to it?

Mr Speaker: In all of these matters, I look at the cut and thrust of debate around all of these issues. I am very happy to look at the Hansard report and come back to the Member directly.

Order. We will move on. I remind Members that they have a general duty to behave responsibly, so as to ensure that nothing that they say may prejudice any future proceedings that may be taken in relation to these matters. I warn Members of that, because Members may sometimes, in the cut and thrust of debate, say something that they regret later.

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

Mr D Bradley: I beg to move

That this Assembly acknowledges the continuing suffering of the families of disappeared victims; pledges its support for them and for the Independent Commission for the Location of Victims’ Remains; and calls on all groups and individuals who have any knowledge of the location of victims’ remains to bring that information in confidence to the commission without further delay.

Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Tá an-áthas orm an rún seo a mholadh. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Choiste Gnó as cead a thabhairt domh an t-ábhar seo a thabhairt faoi bhráid an Tionóil.

I thank the Business Committee for the opportunity to debate the motion. It is timely that we do so in the light of recent events.

We last debated the plight of the families of the disappeared on 3 November 2008 and since then progress has been made by the

Independent Commission for the Location of Victims' Remains in recovering the remains of Danny McIlhone from west Belfast and Charlie Armstrong from Crossmaglen. I place on record the thanks of the House for the excellent work done by the commission and all its staff in giving the families of Danny and Charlie the comfort of being able to bury their loved ones in a Christian fashion.

The commission's work is not easy: it is difficult and it involves showing great sensitivity to the families and to the information it receives. At the end of the day, the quality of the information determines whether a family will get relief from the long wait for the return of a loved one. That is the crux and purpose of the debate. I want to renew the appeal for information on the location of the remains of those victims as yet unrecovered.

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

After the funeral of Charlie Armstrong in Crossmaglen, I spoke to the staff of the commission and they told me that they have the personnel, technology and resources necessary, but that accurate information is of equal value to all of those resources and that it is the key to a successful outcome. The recent search for the remains of Gerard Evans of Crossmaglen, carried out in County Monaghan, covered an area equal in size to four football pitches. The wet ground necessitated the laying of four miles of drainage pipes, but still the search ended in disappointment for all concerned, especially the family. More accurate information would have made all the difference.

I want every party in the House to join in appealing once again for all those who have information about the location of any of the disappeared to bring it to the commission as soon as possible. Information recovered by the commission is treated in the strictest confidence and cannot be used to bring about a conviction.

The operation of the commission is covered in the United Kingdom by the Northern Ireland (Location of Victims' Remains) Act 1999 and in the Republic by the Criminal Justice (Location of Victims' Remains) Act, 1999. Those Acts provide for three types of protection for information provided to the commission. They make such information inadmissible as evidence in criminal proceedings; place restrictions on the forensic testing of human remains and other items found as a result of the

provision of information to the commission; and restrict the disclosure of information provided to the commission except for the purpose of facilitating the location of the remains to which the information relates. That means that the commission may not disclose the identity of an informant or any information likely to lead to the identification of an informant. The protections afforded by the two acts mean that those who provide information have nothing to fear. There is no longer any reason for those who have information to withhold it.

It is important that those who have access to networks of whatever kind, past or present, continue to use their influence to encourage anyone who has information, however insignificant it may seem, to bring that information to the commission without delay.

Gerard Evans' brother, Noel Evans, made an appeal in the media recently after the search for his brother's remains near Hackballscross in County Louth. He underlined the fact that the merest detail of information, such as the type of soil at a site or the presence of any type of landmark nearby, may be enough. Anything at all of significance could make the difference in helping to locate remains.

Sandra Peake of the Wave Trauma Centre, which has done tremendous work in supporting the families over the years, said recently:

"People are genuine in wanting to help. If the team is not in the area where it should be, then lead them to where they should be, in order that the Evans family and other families may be able to lay their loved ones to rest."

More information is needed about the whereabouts of Gerard Evans' remains. That is also the case for the remains of Joseph Lynskey, Seamus Wright, Seamus Ruddy, Kevin McKee, Peter Wilson, Columba McVeigh, Robert Nairac, Brendan Megraw and Lisa Dorrian.

Throughout the history of what we call the Troubles, many individuals have been killed and lost their lives. Many families and communities have struggled with the aftermath of that, and we see that process continuing to the present day. The overwhelming majority of families have had the consolation of waking and burying their dead in accordance with Christian rites. Although those ceremonies have not wiped away every tear, they have provided the possibility of coming to terms with the grief, sorrow and pain

of the tragic death of a loved one. The families of the disappeared who have not yet had the remains of their loved ones returned to them have not even that possibility open to them. They have been left, in many cases for decades, pondering the whys and the wherefores of their loved one's disappearance, wondering about their fate, arriving at their own conclusions and awaiting the recovery of their remains. I hope that the debate will once again focus minds on the need for fresh information and will prompt those with influence to reconnect with those who have information and urge them to bring it forward without further delay.

We can but stand back and admire the families' endurance, patience and great dignity in the face of prolonged anguish. That was typified by the widow of Charles Armstrong, who, during her long wait for the recovery of her husband's remains, remained patient and hopeful without being bitter. Thank God, her hope was rewarded. The families are not, as indeed they are entitled to, asking for retribution. As I said in a previous debate, they are not even seeking justice; they are asking only for the return of the remains of their loved ones so that they may afford them a Christian burial.

Time is of the essence to the families. God knows, they have waited long enough. I hope that the debate will prompt those who have influence and those who have information to come forward to the commission so that more of the families may have the comfort of affording their relative a decent and Christian burial.

A LeasCheann Comhairle, agus mé ag druidim chun deiridh, tá súil agam go mbeidh toradh fiúntach ar an díospóireacht seo, agus go dtiocfaidh na daoine sin a bhfuil eolas acu chun tosaigh chuig an choimisiún gan a thuilleadh moille agus go mbeidh faoiseamh ag na teaghlaigh atá ag fanacht le tamall fada dá bharr.

4.30 pm

I know that all parties in the House will support the motion. I hope that the debate is conducted in a dignified fashion, as exemplified by the widow of Mr Charles Armstrong in her long wait. Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle.

Mr S Anderson: I support the motion. Just last week in this Chamber, Martina Anderson stated:

"Republicans have only ever involved themselves in armed action when there was no other means to pursue their political objectives." — [Official Report, Bound Volume 56, p40, col 1].

This motion, and, more importantly, the murders, the lies that justified those murders, the character assassinations that followed in the wake of those murders, and the long years of mourning that the families have endured all stand as conclusive testimony against Martina Anderson and her self-serving statement last week. They all prove the falseness of every word of that statement.

The motion goes to the dark, murderous and criminal heart of the long years of terrorism that our society endured and the firestorm of sectarian and bloody murder that was inflicted by the terrorists on the entire community, Protestant and Catholic. In her statement in the House last week, Martina Anderson said that republicans only ever involved themselves in armed action when there was no other means to pursue their objectives. Therefore, we are to believe that they had no choice but to kidnap, torture and murder Jean McConville and all the other disappeared.

The Provisional IRA murdered numerous people on the sole grounds that they were of the wrong religion. It murdered others on the sole grounds that they held the wrong political opinion. It abducted, tortured and murdered people for reasons as trivial as looking the wrong way at one of its so-called volunteers. Sinn Féin tells us that it is committed to truth recovery. However, it is clear from Martina Anderson's self-serving statement last week that that commitment on the Sinn Féin Benches does not extend to owning up to the truth about the very terrorist organisation of which she was an active member.

The motion urges all groups and individuals who have any knowledge of the location of victims' remains to make it known. I certainly agree. A good beginning would be to call on Gerry Adams to make known whatever information he may have in that regard. We have had the numerous denials. They are reminiscent of an exchange between Gloucester and Anne in act I, scene II of Shakespeare's play 'Richard III':

"GLOUCESTER: Say that I slew them not?"

ANNE: Then say they were not slain. But dead they are".

I will leave the rest of that quote for another time. If Martin McGuinness can suddenly remember that he did know Father James Chesney after all, perhaps Gerry Adams will find that his memory of the past may change also.

Those who we have come to call the disappeared suffered the ultimate abuse of their human rights at the hands of the greatest abusers of human rights in Northern Ireland over the past 40 years. Their families have endured many years of loss. In many cases, they also endured years of false and malicious whispering campaigns against their loved ones. They deserve the full truth. They deserve the return of the remains of those who were torn so brutally from the bosom of their families.

Mr Adams: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Tá mé buíoch dár gcairde as an rún thábhachtach seo a chur ar chlár an lae inniu. Aontaím le Dominic Bradley nuair a dúirt sé go gcaithfidimid ár ndícheall a dhéanamh ar son na dteaghlach bocht cróga seo.

I thank those Members who put the motion on our clár again today. Dominic Bradley reminded us that, almost two years ago, the Assembly passed a similar motion. Since then, the remains of Danny McIlhone and Charlie Armstrong have been recovered and their families have had the opportunity to bury their loved ones. Other families still hope that the remains of their loved ones will be recovered. I commend all the families for their courage, grace, dignity and resolve, and I note that members of some of the families are in the Public Gallery today. They have suffered a grievous injustice and have campaigned with great dignity over many years. I again express my solidarity with them and my deep regret at the hurt that has been done to them.

I have met all the families bereaved by the IRA in this time. The danger, obviously, in a commendable motion such as this being put on the clár is that it will be used and abused by others who have never said a word to me, never spoken to me and who do not know me, never mind anything else about any of these issues. However, I will not go down that road.

I commend everyone who has sought to help those families. That includes the Independent Commission for the Location of Victims' Remains, the PSNI, An Garda Síochána and the experts and staff who have been brought in to assist in this work. They deserve our full support.

The IRA accepted full responsibility for its actions. It apologised for the injustice done to the families and the grief that it caused. That may be of little consolation to bereaved families, but, according to the forensic science investigative consultant who is working for the independent commission, the IRA provided full disclosure of all the information available to it. He said of the IRA:

"in a spirit of cooperation and reconciliation they are trying to help in every way they can. I am absolutely convinced that they are doing everything they can to assist. The support that we have had from them has been absolutely 100 from day one".

A LeasCheann Comhairle, that does not excuse or minimise the IRA's responsibility for the suffering inflicted on those families and their loved ones. Families are still going forward with hope — dóchas — of success during planned searches or that some new information will emerge to initiate new searches. However, the challenges involved are enormous, and Mr Knupfer has acknowledged that. He has reported that some of those directly involved in the disappearances are now dead, that the terrain has dramatically changed over the decades and that memories are flawed. However, efforts must continue.

That is equally true of cases in which the IRA has said it was not involved. The disappearances of Seamus Ruddy, Gerry Evans, Peter Wilson and Lisa Dorrian are as much a source of trauma and grief for their families as that for the other families. All of them have the fundamental right to bury their loved ones, and there is a responsibility on anyone who can help to bring that about to do so.

Therefore, I repeat my call for anyone with any information whatsoever, no matter how minimal or relevant they might think it is, to bring it forward. Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle.

Mr Kennedy: I begin by welcoming the motion and expressing my support and that of the Ulster Unionist Party for it. The disappeared are one of the most infamous blots on the landscape of Northern Ireland's troubled past. The matter represents a deeply offensive violation of the dignity of the families of the disappeared; a violation that, for decades now, has blighted the lives of many. I am conscious that this is a highly sensitive issue, and I want

to avoid either personalising or politicising it, particularly for the families whose loved ones are still listed as missing.

Murder is an atrocious act, and following it with such prolonged, callous disregard for fellow human beings is, for many, unfathomable. The circumstances surrounding the disappeared are a true litany of horror from the Troubles, and it is important for us to recall that horror. Without naming individuals, they include numerous cases of interrogation and alleged confessions under torture, followed, ultimately, by murder. They include cases in which families' hopes were raised by the provision of information and even, on occasion, by maps showing where their loved ones were buried; information that turned out to be false. They include murders carried out not just in Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic but further afield. The tragedy is compounded by the fact that parents died before knowing the whereabouts of their children's bodies.

There is no way that those activities can be called to mind without shaming the cause in whose name the murders were carried out; the cause of Irish republicanism is forever tainted by those horrors. Mr Adams should know that and Sinn Féin should accept that. They will live forever in the history of infamy.

The tragedy is that families in such circumstances find closure so difficult. How can they find closure when their loved ones' remains lie in some unknown location? It is important to remember that the organisations that carried out the murders did so to inspire fear and to intimidate the very population whose will they claimed to protect and in whose interests they claimed to act. Terror, for that is the only word that is applicable, can never stand for human rights in any shape or form. A cause that is in any way praiseworthy, right or worthwhile cannot use methods that call into question the motivation of all those involved. People who commit crimes of that nature are driven by blood lust, and the infamy of their deeds has shamed the cause that they claim to represent. I also believe that the political associates of the organisations that killed those victims should and could do a great deal more to signify their regret about those evil deeds; they need to make direct and personal reparation to the families involved.

By passing the Presumption of Death (Northern Ireland) Act 2009, which allowed the formal registration of the deaths of the disappeared, the Assembly did what it could to enable families to gain some measure of closure. However, others need to do more.

Dr Farry: I, too, welcome the motion, as it is important that we keep the disappeared on the agenda of this institution. The fate of the disappeared is among the worst atrocities committed during what we call the Troubles, more than just the murders, which were horrendous, but the failure to hand over bodies at the time that the murders were carried out, never mind today.

It is important to put things in context. I never regarded what happened in this society as a war in any shape or form. Those who did what they did claim that they were fighting a war, but how the bodies of the disappeared were handled would, for a legitimate army anywhere else in the world, be a clear breach of the Geneva Convention. Therefore, it is important that those who are responsible reflect on the double standards of the language that they use.

4.45 pm

The Independent Commission for the Location of Victims' Remains has been a partial success story in that the remains of some of the disappeared have finally been recovered. However, there is a long way to go, and Dominic Bradley set out the outstanding cases that are still very much with us. It is also worth reflecting on the sheer time and effort that has had to go into every single case where there has been a successful location of remains and the amount of territory that has had to be dug up just to find an individual set of remains, all of which puts the issue in its proper context.

I was pleased that reference was made earlier to the fate of Lisa Dorrian, one of my constituents. Her case does not fall under the commission's remit, although I think that it should. In many respects, her fate equates to that of the disappeared and reminds us that loyalism was just as much a scourge on this society as was republican violence. It is important that, more than five years since she disappeared, we recall the fate of Lisa Dorrian and the lack of closure for her family.

In trying to take something positive from the debate, it is important that we try to place it in

context. The Independent Commission for the Location of Victims' Remains is one aspect of what can be a much more rounded process for dealing with the past in this society. At present, we have a piecemeal approach. It is striking that the commission is trying to bring closure to families by way of a physical outcome and the handover of a set of remains for a proper Christian burial. However, there are many other families in this society who do not have closure through having a degree of truth recovery.

Truth recovery is often pitched as knowing what the state was involved with, and I recognise that that is an important issue, but it is much broader than that. Truth recovery is also about understanding what happened at the hands of the so-called paramilitaries — the loyalist and republican terrorist organisations. There is, perhaps, a lesson that we can take around the notion of immunity that may help us in trying to fashion a comprehensive system of truth recovery. I reiterate my party's call for the British and Irish Governments to show leadership on that issue.

An important distinction can be drawn between the concept of immunity and that of amnesty. Amnesty, for me, is a very loaded concept, which is about rewriting history on other people's terms, and that should never happen in this society. We cannot rewrite history and pretend that something that was so clearly wrong could somehow be viewed as right or justifiable today. We must reject that. Immunity does not carry those value judgements: it is about the handover of information without it being used. We have used that concept in relation to decommissioning and the disappeared, and it is part of a wider, comprehensive process that includes truth recovery. We need some mechanism for bringing forward information about why certain incidents occurred and who was responsible for them so that other families across Northern Ireland can have their sense of closure as well.

Mr G Robinson: First, I want to express my genuine support for the families who are still waiting for the return of their loved ones after many years. They deserve to have their torment lifted and their loved ones returned to them in a dignified way. This topic has been much in the news recently, as some families have been able to lay their loved ones to rest. It is long overdue that the remains of the disappeared are returned to their loved ones for a dignified

burial. That is the right and decent course of action after the pain that was inflicted on the victims, as well as their grieving families.

I cannot even begin to understand the torment that those families have suffered, some for as long as 38 years, but I want to see it ended. There are nine families who are desperate for the opportunity to say a dignified farewell to a family member who was taken from them and murdered by cowards. In the interests of human decency, those victims must be returned to their loved ones.

There are families that are still in a state of limbo about the whereabouts of their loved ones after almost four decades. What a shame. What a disgrace. After all, the disappeared were human beings, as are their relatives.

As the motion states, I call on all groups and individuals who have any knowledge of the location of victims' remains to bring that information forward in confidence. The information does not have to be given to the Independent Commission for the Location of Victims' Remains, but I urge anyone with knowledge about the location of even one of the disappeared to make sure that the information is provided to a reliable person, organisation, or the police. The Assembly must not forget that some terrorist victims have been kept from their families deliberately. Is that not another form of terror to help to control the people of a particular area?

I hope that the motion is passed unanimously so that the families of the disappeared will see that they have not been forgotten. I fully support the motion.

Mr Murphy: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I also support the motion. Given the contributions so far, I do not think that there will be any division in the Chamber today on the motion, and I do not recall any division on a similar motion in 2008. I also join those who have paid tribute to the families of the disappeared. I have had an opportunity to meet many of them over the past number of years and have been very taken with their quiet determination for one outcome, namely closure through the return of the bodies of their loved ones and the ability to give them a Christian burial.

I commend the commission's work and that of the other agencies that have been involved with it. It has been said that, perhaps, the purpose

of this debate should be to prompt others to continue to work with the commission. That should not be required. I believe that the work with the commission is ongoing and should continue until all the issues and cases have been resolved. The families that I have met have a fundamental right to bury their loved ones and to give them a Christian funeral. The onus is on anyone with responsibility for those issues to help to bring that about. Some have owned up, and some, perhaps, have not.

The focus of our debate and our words on this issue should always be designed to benefit the families and to bring relief, rather than to vent our own prejudices on the issues. Like my party leader, I will not follow the road down which some Members want to lead us. We have a responsibility, in everything we say and do, to try to assist the families with those issues and to try to do what they require us to do, which is to ensure that the commission can get on with its work and that it is provided with accurate information to do that.

Again, I reiterate the call for anyone with any information to bring that information forward in a genuine attempt to be helpful. When I say that, I am mindful of some concerns, and it would be unforgivable and unbelievably cruel if people were tempted to use the issue to pursue other agendas through the provision of false or misleading information to the commission. I trust that that will not be the case, and I know that anyone who has engaged in a genuine way with the commission has found that it is very much interested in pursuing a resolution and finding closure for all the families involved. I call on anyone who has any information to engage genuinely with the commission to try to bring that matter to an end.

Lord Morrow: I support the motion. It is right and timely that such a motion should come before the House. As my party colleague Mr Anderson said, we will give it our unqualified support. We are supposed to be moving on in this country. However, it has to be said very clearly that moving on means different things to different people.

The debate is around the families of the people who are termed “the disappeared”, but that term does not reflect accurately what we are talking about. Although those people have, to all intents and purposes, vanished off the face of the earth, the truth of the matter is quite

different. Those people were taken from their homes and families and murdered, dumped and discarded like something that was not relevant. Although it must be very painful for the families to have to endure the death and murder of their loved ones, it must also be exceedingly painful to have to live your life knowing that you had a son, a brother or another relation taken away and treated in such a manner.

There is an onus on Sinn Féin. I have listened to what it has said this afternoon, and it has a responsibility to place at the disposal of those families all of its resources to help them out of that agony. A number of bodies have been retrieved and returned to the families; for them, there has been a degree of closure. There are quite a number of families who still grieve and long for the day when they will be able to give their loved ones a Christian burial. They could then go to a spot that is marked, whether that it is at the local church or the local graveyard or wherever it might be, and place a bunch of flowers or some other memento that will be a constant reminder of one who was near and dear to them. That has not happened in many cases.

For the life of me, I cannot understand what more mileage is in this for those who took those bodies. I know that, with the passage of time, things can become blurred. Perhaps some who were involved in those activities are now deceased. However, I still feel that more could and should be done to bring those families some closure.

Some of the parents of the people who have disappeared are now dead, and I am certain of least one mother who went to her grave with a broken heart. She longed for the day when she would see her son in some form. He had been missing for a long time, and she was realistic enough to know that he would never come back home alive. However, it would have brought some relief to that mother if she had been able to follow the remains to the local church in which the family worshipped and where she could have gone on occasion to place a bunch of flowers to remember him. She was not allowed to do that, and she has now passed away.

In my mind, the most horrific case is that of Jean McConville. Jean McConville is but a name to me, but, somehow, her circumstances and her situation were so horrific that it is chilling to even talk about it. She was a mother who was

looking after a large family with small children, and her crime was that she gave some comfort to a dying soldier.

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

Lord Morrow: To me, that says more about Jean McConville than it does about those who took her away that day.

Mr B McCrea: Like other Members, I urge those who have any information to come forward with it. I am struck, having listened to the tones that have come out from everybody, that we talk about this in a very serious manner. We do not want to offend anyone, and we want to do everything that we can for the families.

However, we do not deal with the issues. Perhaps some things need saying, not just by me or by individual Members who have already spoken, but by the whole of the Assembly. I am struck by the fact that our failure to deal with many aspects of the past — this issue involves a particularly tragic set of circumstances — is the real failure of the political process. We still have not dealt with the issues of the past. There are, perhaps, Members from all sides who want to rewrite the past to say that bad things did not happen or that if bad things happened, they did so because worse things happened to somebody else whom they knew.

5.00 pm

When we hear kind words and platitudes from people, we sometimes wonder about their genuineness. That causes more hurt to the people whom we are trying to help. There is a case for finding a way to resolve all the issues of the past. Those who genuinely want to build a future for the people of Northern Ireland must own up to what went on in the past. If there was wrongdoing on all sides, there was wrongdoing on all sides. We do not do ourselves, the individuals, the families, or the communities or the societies involved any favours by ducking the issue. It is time that the Assembly got to grips with the horrendous things that happened in the past 30 to 40 years. Soft words, platitudes and calls for people to come forward do nothing for anybody. There is an old adage: actions speak louder than words.

As we look ahead to a difficult and uncertain financial future for the Province, we see that the strains on society will be immense. Those

who claim to offer leadership must be big enough men to step forward and say that they will genuinely lead, rather than simply smiling benignly at us. They must say that they will take us forward on an issue over which they have some control. People on the other side of argument are under an obligation to address that in the proper way. When people come forward with difficult issues, we must find a way of dealing with them in a sensitive manner.

I do not wish to prolong the debate, because it is obvious that we will all vote in favour of the motion, and rightly so. However, I hope that we all find it in us to seek a way to resolve not only the problems of the families and the loved ones who are listening but the problems of our society. I also hope that the Assembly lives up to the hopes and aspirations of all the people of Northern Ireland. I hope that we are courageous enough to take on board and sort out the difficult issues of the past and that we move forward together.

There are plenty of other issues to deal with, such as the economic challenges faced by the people who are still with us, without having to worry about the past. Let us now look at what we might do, by deed and by action, to resolve those matters. Let us have no more of these debates, but resolve them here and now. I am profoundly moved when I read the stories and histories of all the people involved. There is no hierarchy of victims. The disappeared suffered a tragic and grievous harm, but we cannot undo the past. However, we can make the future a better place, and I hope that we will all do that together.

Mr McDevitt: Charlie Armstrong was a 57-year-old civilian and a father of five. He left home for Mass one morning and never came back. His disappearance was long after that of Kevin McKee, 17, and Seamus Wright, 35, who were disappeared on 2 October 1972. Their bodies have never been found.

As many Members have said, Jean McConville, who was 37, also disappeared in 1972. Eamon Molloy, 21, from Ardoyne, went missing in July 1975. James McClory, 18, from Andersonstown, disappeared in May 1978 and Brian McKinney, 22, went missing with him. Brian was believed to have had the mental age of a six-year-old. Eugene Simons was a plumber from Kilcoo in County Down who disappeared on 1 January 1981. Danny McIlhone, also from Andersonstown,

was 19 when he disappeared on 1 July 1981. Peter Wilson went missing from the St James's area of west Belfast in August 1973.

Columba McVeigh was only 17 when he vanished on 1 November 1975. As other Members have said, his mother died without getting his body back. Robert Nairac from Gloucester was 29 when he disappeared on 14 May 1977. Brendan Megraw, 23, from Twinbrook in west Belfast, disappeared on 8 April 1978. Gerard Evans, 24, from Crossmaglen went missing on 27 March 1979. Joe Lynskey was a Cistercian monk, and his name was added to the list of the disappeared last February after the IRA admitted that it had executed and buried him. The INLA claimed the death of Seamus Ruddy, a 33-year-old from Newry who went missing on May Day 1981. His body has never been found. Of course, as Mr Farry said, Lisa Dorrian disappeared more recently, and I agree that she should be considered under the remit of the commission.

As Mr McCrea rightly said, those people represent but the tip of the iceberg of our Troubles. They are the names that we know and they are the circumstances that we understand. They represent a shadow that will hang over us all — every single one of us — whether, like me, you were hardly alive when the first one disappeared or, like many, are old enough to remember the first disappearance. I agree with Mr McCrea that it is beyond the time for simply expressing our determination in words. The process can be brought to a conclusion for the families of the disappeared if information is made available. Information should and could be made available. There can be no person of any political outlook living on this island who considers themselves to be children of this island, to love the place where they were born and the people whom they lived and grew up with, who could not believe that they have a duty to do whatever they can, and more, to bring closure to the families of those who have never had a burial.

It is difficult to conceive, 30-odd years after someone walked out the door, never to return, and was known to have been murdered by certain organisations, that nobody would know how to return those people. Many of us find that very difficult to accept. As I said last week in another debate, I hope that this House becomes a symbol for a new Northern Ireland. I hope that we find it in ourselves to be able to prove

to the many generations that went before us that we are capable of a better future in this part of Ireland. In order to do that while we are living, we must be able to find it in ourselves to dig into the deep recesses of our minds and search through the dark woods of our memories to ensure that every last scintilla of potentially valuable information is passed on.

Mr Molloy: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I, along with other Members from my party, support the motion and support the families of the disappeared. I also support those who have come forward with information that has led to the discovery of some of the bodies. I hope that others have information and will continue to come forward with it to try to alleviate the suffering of families.

I commend the families of the disappeared for their commitment and the way in which they have carried themselves with dignity throughout their time of difficulties. The families had a terrible injustice inflicted on them with the death of a loved one. However, the continued loss of the body and not having a body to grieve over and bury is a continuing injustice that we must try to bring to an end. Some Members have spoken along simplistic lines and said that it is just a matter of it happening. If it were so simple, I am sure that, at this stage, it would have happened.

It is imperative that all efforts continue and that we try to find the remains of those who have not yet been found. It is also important that every effort is made to uncover any scrap of information and evidence that may be of help to the commission. I commend the good work that the commission has done. It has carried out its work with dignity and silence.

It is the fundamental right of any family who have lost a loved one to have a body to bury. It is important that we try to bring that about. Republicans have been working —

Mr A Maginness: Does the Member agree with Mr Adams calling the disappearing of those individuals “a grievous injustice”? Would the Member further agree with me that murdering them in the first place was a grievous injustice?

Mr Molloy: There are two things: first, if the Member had been in the Chamber in time he would have heard me say that; and, secondly, if the Member wishes to make a statement, there

is plenty of time for him to do so. He did not need to intervene to do that.

As I was saying, republicans have been working to ensure that families are given support, comfort and information. Hopefully, further information will come forward. As others have done, I repeat the call for anyone with any information to come forward and give it to whatever source they feel comfortable with. We all want to bring this terrible period to a close for the families and for our community.

Mr Weir: Much has been said in the debate already, so I will try to keep my remarks brief and focused. I commend the proposer of the motion for bringing it forward. He mentioned that the previous debate on the issue was in 2008, and, above all else, the message that we need to send today is that the disappeared cannot become the forgotten. We must ensure that the focus remains on the issue until it is properly resolved.

Mention was made of trying to deal with the past in a holistic way. The more I look at Northern Ireland, the more unsure I am about how we can find a model solution that can deal with the past to everyone's satisfaction. It is certainly beyond me. I am not sure how it can be done. However, there are very specific things that can happen with this issue.

Any time we deal with the past, we need to do so without the fuzzy belief that everyone is a perpetrator or a victim, because that is simply not the case. Members who spoke earlier in the debate said that there is a dreadful stain on the republican and loyalist groups involved in those brutal murders and concealment of bodies, and there is clearly an onus on those organisations to provide whatever information they have. However, there is also a stain on the individuals who took part in those acts, and people have knowledge that they need to come forward with.

My experience of the disappeared is through meeting the family of Lisa Dorrian, although I do not know whether she technically counts as one of the disappeared. I, along with Stephen Farry and other representatives from North Down, have met her family on numerous occasions. That family has been put through a terrible tragedy. Although no one has ever claimed responsibility for the murder, it is widely believed that some so-called loyalists were involved. Meeting the family brought home what every family connected to the disappeared has

experienced. Many Members, myself included, have lost close relatives or someone of the next generation. That is a tragedy for any family, and there is grief associated with those deaths. However, when a father and mother lose a son or daughter, it goes against the natural order of things, particularly when they are subject to such a brutal murder.

5.15pm

Generally speaking, all of us who have had to overcome the grief of the loss of a close relative had the opportunity to have a funeral service, a service of thanksgiving, a burial or a cremation. All of us who have been in that situation had the opportunity to achieve a sense of closure. However, it is a deep human tragedy for a family, whether it is that of Lisa Dorrian or any of the other disappeared, to be left not knowing what happened to their son or daughter or where their son or daughter is. They are left without a place to grieve, a tombstone at which to lay flowers or even somewhere to go where ashes have been scattered. Beyond all the statistics that can be produced on the matter, we are dealing with families who have suffered immense grief and a great human tragedy.

I mentioned that there is an onus not simply on organisations but on individuals. People out there were involved in the murders directly, and others know, or have some suspicion about, what happened. In addition to what any of the organisations involved can provide, there is a deep onus on any individual who has any such knowledge or suspicion to come forward, whether to the commission, the families concerned or the police, with the information that will allow those families, from whatever side of the religious divide they come, to be able to have closure and properly grieve for their lost relations once and for all. I commend the motion to the House.

Mr Bell: Thank you for your indulgence in letting me speak, Mr Deputy Speaker. I was with a young man from my council area, Aaron Stubbs, who, at the age of 14, has managed to win not only Ulster's tennis Championship but the all-Ireland under-16 tennis championship. He was here today, and the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure wished to have a photograph taken. I apologise for the delay and for not being here for part of a very worthwhile debate.

I thank Mr Dominic Bradley for tabling the motion. It is a very important motion, because

it addresses an issue in respect of which it is within the gift of us in Northern Ireland to right a terrible wrong. This is not a debate in which to score political points off each other. Northern Ireland should feel a collective shame that the loved ones of those who were killed in the most difficult and painful of circumstances have not been allowed to go through the normal process of grieving.

Many years ago, I took a degree in psychology. There is a process of grieving, along which there are acts of closure. People live for a lifetime with the loss of a family member or a loved one. We do not want, in any way, to take away from that, because that loved one is irreplaceable. People live with that loss every day. Some people who lost loved ones in the Troubles in Northern Ireland told me that their loss is the first thing that they think about when they wake up and the last thing that they think about before they go to bed. Most of those people had, within their religious background or faith, the closure of a formal ceremony of their choosing and have a grave to which they can go at significant moments in life, such as birthdays, christenings or family marriages, to show their respect to their loved one.

The fact that some do not have that is a wrong that we must put right collectively. A united plea must come from the House to anyone who can help in any way. Civil servants are often criticised, but I appreciate the difficult decisions that they have to make about whether to undertake digs, and so forth. Although our thoughts are with them, our thoughts must be with the victims primarily. In all likelihood, their loss is the first thought when they wake up and their last thought before they go to bed, but they do not have the ability to ensure closure.

I appeal to people who can give that information to give it on the grounds of basic humanity, to allow people to progress with their lives, to allow families to have the opportunity to have a ceremony of closure and to allow people with religious conviction to have that properly observed. For some families of the disappeared, time is moving on, but for others, it is not. It is not as if we have an unlimited amount of time and can settle the matter at some later date, because none of us are guaranteed tomorrow. It is action that we want today.

The simple plea goes out on the basis of common humanity. If people can give information, they

should do so, and the necessary government structures should be in place, hopefully, to allow that search to come to a successful conclusion. Families deserve closure. They need it. It is not negotiable. I appeal for them to have that and for Northern Ireland to close a chapter of its history, not to airbrush the disappeared out of history, but to close a chapter of its history in a healthy way. If there is sufficient goodwill, I plead for that to occur.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I pay tribute to my colleague for introducing the motion. The debate has been handled with dignity, and there is a common spirit of respect around the Chamber. In many ways, that is a good thing, given the sensitivities that exist outside the Chamber among the families. Collectively, we can only imagine their loss. It has been a loss that they have not seen an end to, and they do not have a place to which they can go and pay their respects. Many Members referred to that.

My colleague Dominic Bradley referred to the work of the commission. He referred to the telling remarks of Noel Evans, who is the brother of Gerard Evans, and spoke of the suffering of the Armstrong family. Mr Anderson referred to the abuse of human rights and the years of loss endured by the families. Mr Adams referred to those who had suffered a grievous injustice at the hands of, in some instances, the provisional movement. Mr Kennedy reflected on the suffering of parents and families and said that organisations could do more for those families. Mr Farry referred to the breach of the Geneva Convention by any definition of war and spoke of the sense of closure that was required. George Robinson, among others, called for people who can provide information to come forward. Mr Murphy drew proper attention to the need for Christian burial in the cases of all those people who are missing from their families.

Mr Morrow touched on the pain and suffering endured by families, the ability to visit graves and the heartbreak of a mother. I will come to that shortly, because I believe that we might be talking about the same person. Basil McCrea correctly mentioned the deeds and actions that are required to bring about a better future and to build that future. I am sure that he will accept that it must be a future built on dignity and respect for the people who were lost at the hands of paramilitaries.

My colleague Mr McDevitt listed all the people who have disappeared at the hands of paramilitaries. Mr Molloy referred to the requirement for the alleviation of suffering and the need for more information to come forward. Mr Weir spoke of the loyalist and republican organisations that contributed to the awful situation and spoke touchingly about the closure, as he saw it, brought about by religious services and burial. Mr Bell also mentioned that.

In summation, it is important to note the facts behind the motion. The disappeared were abducted, murdered and secretly buried by members of paramilitary organisations; their families still grieve deeply for them. Those actions were designed deliberately to intimidate people and to create uncertainty and fear in the communities from which the victims were taken. The commission identified the disappeared as people who were abducted between 1972 and 1995. At the start of 2010, a further person was added to the list of the disappeared.

Since 1999, the commission has tried to return the victims' remains to their families. In July 2010, the remains of Charlie Armstrong were located at a site in County Monaghan and returned to his family. The burial sites of other victims who were abducted and, presumably, murdered remain to be found. The party to my right, Sinn Féin, may believe that, in the words of its party president, it is a human rights violation that victims' families have been unable to bury their dead. My party, along with the rest of society, recognises that the abductions and murders were the initial human rights violations. The fact that the people who were responsible have been granted immunity from prosecution in respect of any evidence that is gathered in the recovery of those remains is a disgrace. However, it is a fact that people must live with on the pathway to, we hope, discovery of those bodies.

The families deserve for the remains of their loved ones to be returned. Today, we demand it. A number of times, I sat with the late Mrs Vera McVeigh, whose son is in the Public Gallery, in her home. I heard her worries, concerns and absolute, utter heartbreak that the remains of her young son had never been returned to her. It would have taken a tear from a stone to listen to that elderly lady speak of the disappearance of her son as though it were yesterday. There is still information out there that could lead to the return of Columba McVeigh's remains; there are people who know where his remains are.

If they have any respect for humanity or for a Christian burial, I implore them or anyone who is in a position to instruct them to tell them to come forward to allow people to bury their family members with dignity.

They know that that is the right thing to do; occasionally, they have difficulty finding out the honourable thing to do. I plead with them to do what is both right and honourable: to come forward, state the truth and tell where the bodies are buried so that the families can visit those graves, pay respects to their loved ones and, after so many years, can say that their remains are back with their families.

We believe that people out there have that information. We call upon those individuals and groupings to bring that information to the commission without delay. Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly acknowledges the continuing suffering of the families of disappeared victims; pledges its support for them and for the Independent Commission for the Location of Victims' Remains; and calls on all groups and individuals who have any knowledge of the location of victims' remains to bring that information in confidence to the commission without further delay.

Adjourned at 5.29 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 12 October 2010

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Ministerial Statement

Review of Higher Education Funding and Student Finance in England and the Independent Review of Variable Fees and Student Finance in Northern Ireland

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, Mr Speaker, I wish to make a statement.

Today's publication of the independent review of higher education funding and student finance, chaired by Lord Browne of Madingley, represents a significant milestone in the evolution of higher education in the United Kingdom. Our universities have, over centuries, contributed to a culture of learning in the British Isles, shaped our public discourse and increasingly played a significant economic role.

The reforms of the universities in the nineteenth century, particularly the removal of religious tests and the inclusion of women, ensured that higher education was opened up beyond an elite. The creation of new universities in the first decades of the twentieth century and the 1960s greatly contributed to a further opening up of higher education to social groups who previously would not have considered attending a university.

In recent years, we have witnessed a dramatic expansion in our university population. In Northern Ireland, we have achieved the 50% target that was set out by the former Government for university participation among 18-year-olds to 25-year-olds. We also have the highest and best higher education participation rates in the country for those from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, and that is an

achievement in which we in this part of the United Kingdom should take great pride.

In 2008-09, 41.7% of Northern Ireland's young full-time first degree entrants were from socio-economic classes 4 to 7, compared with only 32.4% in England and 28.2% in Scotland. The existing fees regime has not impacted adversely on our participation rates, so far.

That extension of opportunity has greatly benefited our society. However, it brings challenges, which intensify in straitened economic times. As a society, here in Northern Ireland and across the United Kingdom, we have to ask ourselves how we are to secure investment in higher education and how we will find the right balance between taxpayers' contributions and those of the individual who benefits from the experience of higher education. Lord Browne's report will help us to think through that challenge.

Of course, at this early stage, none of us in the House could possibly provide a meaningful, thoughtful response to the 64-page report. It will require careful reading and consideration by the House, the Committee, the Department, Executive colleagues, our universities and other stakeholders, including, of course, the students themselves. I, therefore, welcome the opportunity to update the Assembly on the latest developments on higher education funding and student finance in England and to inform the Assembly of my intentions for moving forward in Northern Ireland on those important issues.

As Members will be aware, the independent review of higher education funding and student finance in England was launched in November 2009. Lord Browne was tasked with making recommendations to the Government on the future of fees policy and financial support for full- and part-time undergraduate and

postgraduate students. The review fulfilled the commitment made by the Government during the Commons stages of the Higher Education Act 2004 to review the operation of variable tuition fees after they had been in force for three years. I am glad that Lord Browne's report has been published and I look forward to considering carefully the detail behind today's headlines.

Members will recall that I commissioned Joanne Stuart, the chairwoman of the Institute of Directors in Northern Ireland, to carry out an independent review of variable fees and future student finance arrangements in Northern Ireland. I received Joanne's report in March and have been considering her recommendations. As I indicated at the time, I am grateful for the report and for the time and effort given to the issue by Joanne Stuart and the external steering group that supported the work. The independent report is an important document and is making a key contribution to our deliberations on those issues.

In her report, Joanne Stuart indicated that there would be a need to review her recommendations in light of the output of the Browne review. In order to facilitate and inform debate on the consultation, I have asked Joanne Stuart to update her report in light of Lord Browne's. That is in keeping with the recommendations of the original report. I am pleased that Joanne has agreed to undertake that. I, therefore, intend to consider Lord Browne's report in conjunction with Joanne Stuart's report before bringing forward a public consultation on those very important issues. In advance of the consultation, however, I intend to publish Joanne Stuart's report today so that everyone has the opportunity to consider it within the context that Lord Browne's report now provides. It will be published at 2.30 pm and made available on the departmental website.

I referred earlier to the external steering group that supported Joanne Stuart in carrying out the review here. The group and the involvement of the key stakeholders benefited the process, and I want to ensure that we continue to build on the constructive working relationships that were established. To that end, I recently wrote to the members of the previous group to seek nominations to participate on a Department-led stakeholder group during the forthcoming consultation phase to contribute to the development of future student finance policy for Northern Ireland.

As soon as my officials and I have an opportunity to consider the Browne report, along with the recommendations in the Stuart report, we expect to move forward apace with preparations for a consultation in Northern Ireland on those important issues. The first meeting of the stakeholder group will be held in mid-November, which will provide an early opportunity for engagement with key stakeholders on the proposed consultation paper. Officials are also due to brief the Committee for Employment and Learning in late November. I value the role that the Committee will bring to the process, and I look forward to working constructively with it and with the Assembly as we create a long-term strategic plan for the future of our students in Northern Ireland.

I made contact with key stakeholders in the past 24 hours, including the vice chancellors of Queen's and the University of Ulster, the president of the National Union of Students and the Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning. I value the opportunity to garner initial reactions from those key stakeholders and I hope that the findings of the Browne and Stuart reviews will stimulate a mature, responsible and informed debate on the future funding of higher education in Northern Ireland.

Lord Browne's report challenges the Assembly and the Executive to consider the way forward for higher education in Northern Ireland. Queen's University, Belfast and the University of Ulster proudly compete with some of the very best higher education institutions on these islands.

Put simply, for that to continue, ongoing investment will be required. It will also require us, as legislators, and the Executive, to determine the appropriate balance between the contribution from taxpayers and that from the individuals who benefit from higher education.

At a time of grave economic difficulty, cheap words and easy promises from the House would betray the responsibility placed on us to demonstrate real leadership. Northern Ireland now needs to have a mature, responsible debate on the funding of the higher education sector and student finance that will allow a consensus to emerge on securing investment in our universities while protecting and improving our widening participation record.

**The Chairperson of the Committee for
Employment and Learning (Mrs D Kelly):**

I thank the Minister for his statement. As

Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning, I make clear that the Committee will take a thorough look at the Browne and Stuart reports and take soundings from all key stakeholders.

I listened carefully to what the Minister said and noted that he has not had much opportunity to digest the recommendations of the Browne report. I hope that when he has had time to consider it, he will come back to the House to make a further statement on how he intends to take some of those matters forward.

Higher education is too significant an economic driver for rash decisions to be made. What does the Minister think the Browne report means for Northern Ireland? Are we in a position to ignore it? Does it contain sufficient protection for the current level of social inclusion at our universities, and what will it mean for widening access?

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

I am grateful for the Member's comments. Of course, it will be necessary to come back to the House at an early stage once we have consulted stakeholders and know the comprehensive spending review (CSR) settlement, because, to some extent, those two things have to be read together.

The Member asked what the Browne report means for Northern Ireland, particularly for our widening participation policy, of which the House should be very proud. That is the very question: will there be Barnett consequentials? Although it is perfectly clear that these are devolved matters, we will defend our position, and it is for the Assembly to make any changes that we feel to be appropriate.

Ultimately, our ability will be determined in large measure by how we are financed on this matter. We will not know what the total block grant will be until next week. However, within that, the Executive, the Committee and the House will have to make decisions about what priority will be applied to this area of activity and how we juxtapose that priority with other key areas such as health and education.

Therefore, I say to the Member: no rash decisions will be taken; it is too important a matter for off-the-cuff responses. I repeat what I said in my statement: we will have to have a mature and responsible debate. Let us be frank: it would be very easy in an election year to beat

one's chest and say that we are backing this or that on the basis that they may be populist matters. We will not know the full implications of the Browne report until we read it in the context of the CSR settlement.

We also need to see the reaction of Ministers in London. I understand that we will get some indication of that at 3.30 this afternoon when Ministers make statements. Only when we see all that together will we know how the report will restrict our ability to manoeuvre locally, if it comes to that. However, this is a devolved matter, and I assure the Member that the Committee will play a pivotal role, as it always does on key matters concerning the Department.

10.45 am

Mr Bell: I thank the Minister for a mature and comprehensive response to a difficult question for Northern Ireland. I want to make three points. Let me build on what we said yesterday. Fairness and quality should be built into our agenda. Fairness to allow socially disadvantaged students to access university education, and in that we lead the rest of the United Kingdom, but also quality to ensure that our universities can compete at the highest level in the British Isles, Europe and the United States.

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

Mr Bell: Let us remember that the Stuart report was written when house prices in Northern Ireland were going up by £75,000 a year and Lehman Brothers was still trading. Therefore, can the Minister ensure that, in marrying the Browne and Stuart reports, we have a university system fit for purpose that has fairness and quality at its heart?

The Minister for Employment and Learning: In recent years, we have invested heavily in higher education. The worst that can happen is that we squander the gains that have been made. There are people at university today whose families never thought that they would see their children at university. I recall going, as I normally do, to the summer graduation ceremonies for the Step Up students at Jordanstown. I met people from schools in disadvantaged areas and whose families never thought that they would see their children at university. They are there because we have invested in a particular scheme to give direct access to higher education to those

from disadvantaged backgrounds. We have the best figures in the UK, not only for total participation of 18-year-olds and younger, first-time undergraduates, but for participation of students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

My Department is writing a strategy to complete the widening access agenda. Even though access has widened and people are going to university who would never have gone before, as I said at Question Time yesterday, there are still significant pockets of under-representation as far as participation in higher education is concerned. Therefore, on the fairness side of the Member's agenda, I can tell him that the Department remains fully committed. It would be entirely wrong to squander the gains that have been made. We have made progress, but we have not completed the journey.

As far as quality is concerned, our universities and university colleges have an excellent record. Look at last year's research assessment exercise (RAE) ratings: both our universities moved well up the ladder, with very significant levels of world-class research. Both are well within the top 50, out of the 189 universities in the United Kingdom. In those circumstances, having invested so much revenue and capital, there is little value, from the point of view of quality and fairness, in squandering that.

If this is the sort of template within which the discussion is going to take place, I am more than happy, because those are two key areas. I add a third area: the relevance of the universities to the economy. Those are the areas where we have to have this debate. We do not have all the facts at our disposal. I want to thank the team in my Department, which started to prepare some of this information at 7.30 am. Debate on this in the House will have to be informed by those three things: fairness, quality and the relevance of what we do in higher education to economic development.

Mr Butler: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his statement. I take it from what he says that he is in favour of lifting the cap on tuition fees and putting people who want third-level education deeper into debt. The Minister has referred to Joanne Stuart's report, and I know that he is going to publish it today. What recommendations did it make as regards the cap on tuition fees? Did the report recommend lifting it? How will he explain to the many students and graduates, as

well as their families, that they will be picking up a huge bill of debt for the next 30 years if the Browne report is implemented here in the North of Ireland?

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

First, the Member is correct to say that universities are about more than fees. I personally take what may be an old-fashioned view of universities in that I do not see them as degree factories; I see them as places of learning, where people get together to have their learning experience and capabilities expanded. Universities widen horizons.

Nevertheless, universities are very expensive places. In broad terms, and to put it in context, we spend over £500 million a year on our universities in Northern Ireland. The bulk of that — £288 million — goes on student support. Therefore, more goes on student support than in block grants to universities. It is important that Members understand that. Having said that, however, it was obvious that, in the context of the ongoing review, we would not be able to ignore an area with such expenditure. I have had two conversations over the past couple of months with the Finance Minister, including one the week before last, where these issues have been discussed. There were no circumstances in which higher education would get a complete bye ball in the spending review.

As I said in my answer to the previous question, we have things that we have to protect. Members will see later today that the thrust of Joanne Stuart's report is that the present level of fees should, by and large, remain as they are, with some caveats. However, as Mr Bell indicated, that report was largely compiled last year, and, of course, circumstances have changed. The Government have changed, as has the whole public finance situation. Joanne Stuart anticipated that, as Members will see when they have a chance to study her report. She clearly states that she will want to look at her recommendations in the light of what Browne comes up with. However, even Browne's report was amended; I believe that he was given further instructions over the summer to include other issues.

There is a significant difference in approach between Joanne Stuart's report and the Browne report, and it will be for Members to compare and contrast them. However, Joanne Stuart anticipated that, and she will update Members

and the report in the coming weeks in light of what has happened. I presume that we will also have the benefit, whether that is good, bad or indifferent, of knowing what financial effects will flow from the Barnett consequentials of the matter.

Mr McClarty: I thank the Minister and congratulate him on his statement. Does he agree that it is not a sustainable way forward for higher education in Northern Ireland to pretend that changes in funding to universities in England have no implications for this part of the United Kingdom?

The Minister for Employment and Learning: The Member catches the point entirely. This is Browne's report, but do not forget that it is nothing more than a report at the moment. We will have some indications about the matter later today when Ministers in London give their initial reactions to it. What will those reactions be? We should not forget that the report would have to be translated into decisions by Parliament. Therefore, there is a political aspect to the issue to be considered. As we know, the Opposition in London are now in favour of a graduate tax, even though it was the Opposition party that introduced fees in the first place. Indeed, I would point out that it did so against the wishes of every party in this House.

The fact remains that two things mean that we cannot and will not be allowed to ignore the implications of what happens in London. First, as I said yesterday, in answer to a question from, I think, Mr McCrea, Revenue and Customs is not prepared to introduce a system in Northern Ireland for collecting student loans that is separate to that which applies elsewhere.

I wrote to Revenue and Customs to ask whether we could raise our threshold for repayments, but that was ruled out simply because Revenue and Customs was not prepared to have a two-tier system. I think that we would all be pleased if the threshold for loan repayments were raised. Indeed, a number of Members wrote to me about that issue over the past year. Therefore, I fully appreciate that a raising of the threshold is something with which Members would be content. However, if there is significant change to the block grant as a result of the report's proposals and decisions that Ministers may take, the Executive will not be able to ignore all that but will have to consider it. Ultimately, the House will have to vote on a Budget, assuming

that one comes forward, that will determine the priorities that we place on all those matters. We cannot take any one of them in isolation.

In the next few months, the House will have some very difficult decisions to make. As I said previously, I hope that we are able to rise above party politics, because we are taking about the future of another generation of young people. They are the seedcorn of our future economic prosperity. We have to see things in that context.

Mr Lyttle: I thank the Minister for his statement. I am glad that the House recognised that higher education changes lives and life chances and that it is a key economic driver for us as we try to get out of recession. Will the Minister give his initial reflections on the reaction that he has received from some of the key stakeholders, such as the vice chancellors and student representatives?

The Minister for Employment and Learning: The vice chancellors and students are obviously concerned. To put it in context, I liken the report and its potential consequences for higher education to what the Education Act (Northern Ireland) 1947 did for basic education. This is major stuff; it is probably the biggest proposed change for universities since the nineteenth century. The implications are that the block grant system, which provides around 40%, 41% or 42% of university funding in Northern Ireland, will be replaced by a system in which the money follows the student. In other words, universities will have to compete to get students through the door, because that is from where their main source of revenue will come.

We pay roughly £210 million in various grants to our universities. That would be replaced by fees. Therefore, the Government would step back and would lose its influence and ability to shape policy. That would allow for a free market to operate in higher education. That is a very different proposition to the system to which we are accustomed.

Think of the implications: the universities' main source of revenue will become their students. Universities would, of course, continue to receive money from third parties, the private sector and philanthropic bodies, but the Government's role would be to step back and allow, effectively, a free market in higher education. That is a very different proposition. It would work if the universities were to succeed and do well, but what would happen if one

of them were to falter? Those are the sort of issues that we will have to address.

This is very big stuff. It is hard, in the very short time that we have had, to absorb some of the information, but it is very significant. The report indicates that we will raise the threshold, that any balance after 30 years of fees — it is currently 25 years — will be written off and that repayments will stop if earnings dip below £21,000.

We know that protections are built in. Indeed, an increase in students is recommended, although that is in England; we have already reached those targets. However, I say to the Member that this is big stuff, and it would be wrong of us to rush to any quick decisions. Students who have been studying the review are concerned that its recommendations may become a barrier to widening participation by saddling people with debts of at least £20,000 in fees alone, excluding living costs.

Another interesting aspect of the review is that there would be one point of application. Currently, people apply to UCAS for a university place and apply separately to a different location for their finance. The proposal is to bring that process together in one place. The proposed changes are radical, and we will have to take time to consider them.

11.00 am

Mr S Anderson: I, too, thank the Minister for his statement. Given that Northern Ireland has achieved 50% of 18- to 25-year-olds attending university, will the Minister assure the House that we will continue to lead other parts of the United Kingdom in offering more places to socially disadvantaged students?

The Minister for Employment and Learning: I will repeat to the Member for Upper Bann what I said in response to a previous question: it would be a terrible shame to lose the gains and the ground that we have made through the investment of public money and the tremendous effort of our universities and students. The Department for Employment and Learning has put an additional 21% of revenue into universities in the past five years. Universities have been permitted to keep all the fee income that they received, which runs to around £80 million a year. Universities have also increased their income from third-party sources, such as the private sector and philanthropic bodies. That

is why they are performing so well, moving up the league tables and attracting more students.

As a net exporter of students, Northern Ireland is a unique region, a matter raised by Member after Member right around the House for years. At any time, at least a quarter of our students are at universities elsewhere; most in Great Britain, some in the Republic. Is the Member asking me what the implication is if, suddenly, people must acquire debts running into £25,000, £28,000 or £30,000 that they will have to start repaying? That is equivalent to mortgages that many of us would have taken out earlier in our life, and it is a huge undertaking. I think that the Member is raising the question of whether that will be a tipping point for students who might say that they cannot afford to take such a risk. Those are arguments that we must have. Because university funding is very expensive, there are no easy options. As I said, it accounts for 55% to 60% of my Department's budget, which amounts to more than £500 million a year. It is big stuff, and do not forget that many students are beginning to study for their degree at our further education colleges as well. That is a very positive growth area that we are encouraging.

The Member has asked the two key questions that the House will have to address in the coming months. I hope that the answer to those questions will be that, no matter what our differences may be on other political issues, we are not prepared to sacrifice the gains that we have made and that we will work our way round that. However, that is something that the House, as a whole, will have to decide.

Ms S Ramsey: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I join other Members in commending the Minister for his statement. It would be useful to get a further update as quickly as possible on the issues raised in Joanne Stuart's report. I, like the Minister, commend our further and higher education institutions. This debate is not about the positive work that they do; it is about further education being available to and accessed by those who have and, indeed, those who have not. I remind the Minister about social inclusion.

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

Ms S Ramsey: Social inclusion is a key theme in the Programme for Government. How much of the fees currently paid by students goes directly on the wages of lecturers and senior staff in our

education institutions? Furthermore — it may be a radical thought — have the universities or, indeed, the Department proposed capping salary increases for senior management in those institutions?

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

With respect to the Member's last point, earlier this year I wrote to the universities to draw their attention to public anxiety about salary increases, and I received positive responses from both vice chancellors. Therefore, the senate at Queen's and the council in the University of Ulster are aware of my views and the views of the House on the matter, and they responded positively to my letters.

Of course social inclusion is at the core of the Programme for Government. Even the most hostile observer would have to agree that we have put our money where our mouth is with respect to higher education. The facts and figures prove that there are people in higher education who would not be there other than for the fact that we had a policy to get them there. As I said to other Members, whatever we do, we must ensure that we do not jeopardise those gains. However, we also have to be realistic about what we can do, because, although the matter is devolved, we are not completely isolated. At the end of the day, finance is the factor that tips the balance and makes the difference. If we get the money that we currently receive, we will have options. However, if things change and resources are reduced due to Barnett consequentials, the whole Executive will have to take a view on the matter, because the problem will be on such a scale that my Department will not be able to deal with it on its own. The matter will have to go to the Executive, and, ultimately, the Assembly will have to vote on a Budget, which is why the Committee's role will be very important. That is where detailed scrutiny will take place and that is where Members will be able to judge whether the balance is right. However, we do not have all the information.

I believe that I am right in saying that fees go in total to the universities, which are charged with dispensing them. We have not interfered in that flow of money. I repeat: in the past five years, we have increased by 21% our portion of the block grant and various other funding streams that we pass to the universities. On top of that, they receive the entirety of the fee income, which amounts to about £80 million a year. No

one can say that we have not treated higher education generously.

Mr Ross: I thank the Minister for his statement. He correctly highlighted the huge changes that could come about as a result of the proposals. Of course, advocates of the proposals argue that people do not have a right to go to university. However, as the Minister rightly said, in Northern Ireland, we can be proud of the fact that so many young people from lower-income families have been able to go to university. Many of them go to university across the water. Does the Minister share my concern and, indeed, the concern of many families this morning that the proposals may lead to young people from lower-income families having their opportunities limited due to the fact that they will simply not be able to afford to attend certain courses and institutions?

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

I have to agree with the Member that that is one of the risks. There is no doubt that it is. However, it is also fair to say and the report makes it clear that there will be no upfront costs. Even though the total bill at the end of one's course might be bigger, there will be no upfront cost for doing the course. That, in itself, does not mean that there is a cash barrier. However, I believe that there is a significant psychological barrier, which says to people that the debt that they will accrue is going to double or more.

Although it is fair to say that the statistics support the proposition that the introduction of fees had an initial negative effect, it was preceded by a surge of people going to university before fees were introduced, followed by a dip. However, the numbers have come back up, and we have had a 12% increase in applications in the current year. If I were to be asked whether we would have had a 12% increase in applications had our fees been more than twice what they currently are, I would have to say that, somewhere along the graph, the point would be reached at which people would say that the fees are too much.

Let me make myself clear: we are not pushing now to increase the proportion of people who go to university. That is because we believe that we have probably reached the right level. University is not for everybody. We need apprentices and people in the labour market who have different skills. We must remember that the Department

has to deal with a wide range of people, including those who have no skills whatsoever and need essential reading and writing skills. I have made it absolutely clear to the Department that, in any spending cuts that we may have to make, it is not allowed to touch money that I have ring-fenced for essential skills. If people cannot read or write when they leave school, what chance in life do they have? That is a fundamental issue. As I said yesterday, it is a disgrace that so many people are coming out of school without those basic skills. We are ring-fencing money for that, and I have made it clear to the Department that that is where we are coming from.

I will say this to the Member: we need to look at precisely where the balance is and at which point someone will make a decision not to go to university because of cost. We need to research that, to talk to students and potential students and to shape the debate about the priority that the Assembly is going to give to higher education. However, that must not be to the exclusion of other areas of departmental work. We need a varied range of skills in our workforce.

University is not for everybody. I have long held the belief that there is a certain inverted snobbery in our society that someone who has a professional, technical or vocational qualification is not held in the same esteem, perhaps, as someone who has an academic qualification. That is wrong, and it is a mistake. Other countries in Europe that are successfully powering ahead, such as Germany, value people with professional, technical or vocational qualifications far more than we do. It is a question of balance. From what I have heard in the Chamber today, I am very happy that the debate that will ensue in the coming months will take account of that balance, and that Members will be acutely aware of the risks that we run with what may be a radically different financial regime from that which we have been used to.

Mr McCallister: I welcome the Minister's statement. Given all the comments that have been made, Northern Ireland's reputation for learning and excellence, the importance of education to our economy and, as other Members have said, to social inclusion, and the Minister's commitment to keeping the gains that we have made, does he agree that this has been a useful start to the debate? There is a huge responsibility on the Department, the

Assembly and the Committee for Employment and Learning to lead the debate and to come up with a sensible and balanced way ahead.

The Minister for Employment and Learning: I am encouraged by the tone of the debate. It is already clear that Members see the significance of the review. I felt that it was important to come to the Assembly at the earliest opportunity, even though I readily admit that, between 7.30 am and now, we have not been given an opportunity to carry out an in-depth analysis. Nevertheless, I thought that it was important at least to start things off so that we can try to shape the debate in our community. At the end of the day, decisions that we will make in here will determine the outcome. If you believe in devolution, as I do, that is the name of the game. However, we cannot be isolated from external factors, of which finance is, of course, a critical one. Even though someone of the Member's wealth may not have problems, everybody else has to cut their coat according to their cloth. We are no exception.

11.15 am

We want to protect the most vulnerable in our community and encourage people into university education, as it can be a life-changing experience that can open doors. All the evidence suggests that university graduates earn more. However, as I said, they are not the only people in the community whom we must consider; there are others. I have pointed out to the Member that among those are people who are less fortunate do not even have the basic skills to read, write and count properly. Until the Assembly cures that problem to its satisfaction, a balance must be struck. People in our community have so many varied levels of ability and skill. That does not mean that they do not have potential; however, we are not doing things 100% right because we still need to resolve those problems. I am confident that the Assembly will have a mature debate on the issue in which I look forward to participating. I am sure that the Committee will want to make its own decisions and decide on its work programme. Over the next few months, we will be very busy on this subject.

Mr P Ramsey: I thank the Minister for coming along this morning. The SDLP is disappointed that, although the Minister has conceded that Northern Ireland is in a unique situation with special circumstances, Joanne Stuart's

report has lain on someone's desk for six months, during which time we could have had a mature, responsive and informed debate to lead up to now. Joanne Stuart's report will now be absolutely overshadowed by Browne's report. Given the high levels of poverty and disadvantage in Northern Ireland — much greater than those in Britain — does the Minister not believe that the Browne report will cause further hardship, distress, disadvantage and poverty across Northern Ireland?

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

There are two arguments to take place. We knew, as did Joanne, from the beginning that the Browne report was coming. We were the first in the UK, I think, to kick off the process, but we recognised and she made it clear that her report could not be read in isolation from the Browne report. The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) does a great deal of work for us. We are not isolated; we are in the UCAS system and are part of the UK higher education system. Therefore, although we could have produced the report earlier, Joanne Stuart took the view — rightly, as it turns out — that she may have to look again at some of her recommendations in light of the Browne report. That is exactly what happened. When I spoke to her yesterday, she was willing to conduct an update of her report in light of those recommendations.

The financial arrangements that we are likely to face today are a world away from those that obtained in February or March when I got Joanne's report. The Member should not despair: although the report issues huge challenges, until we see the financial implications — we will get some flavour of those next week — it is too early for the Member to make a rash judgement that, somehow or other, our achievements in higher education will take a nosedive. I have not come to that conclusion. The Member's contribution was unique: it is the first time that he did not get his oar in about a university in Londonderry.

Ms Lo: Lots of comments have been made about barriers to people from socially disadvantaged communities embarking on future degrees. From what I read, the report proposes doing away with bursaries in universities. That would be another barrier on top of the doubling of the fees. Will the Minister, at least, consider encouraging universities to maintain bursaries that often help young people

from lower-income families, particularly for degrees such as medicine and architecture, for which students have to buy a lot of material and expensive books?

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

The Member is correct to point out the issue of bursaries. Members will be aware that both universities have been making bursaries available. Indeed, the year before last, Queen's introduced a higher level of bursary to encourage students to go into STEM areas. However, the report, as I understand it, anticipates a higher level of support for students as some way of offsetting the bursary issues. The Member will also be aware that a higher level of maintenance grant support is provided to students in Northern Ireland than in the rest of the United Kingdom. Therefore, to some extent, we already have the best of both worlds, because we have bursaries and higher levels of student support. However, that detail, significant though it might be, can only be read in the context of whether there will be Barnett consequentials. Until we see what those consequentials will be, it will be hard to be definitive. I am trying to be careful not to hang us on hooks that we cannot get off, because we do not have all of the information.

The report talks about greater support for part-time students. We should remember that they, to some extent, have been forgotten about in this matter. We have been talking primarily about full-time students, but there is a large number of part-time students. There is huge potential to grow the number of part-time students, and that will allow people, even during their career, to change and to increase their learning. Indeed, the Department has been thinking of looking at the bursary model to steer or encourage students in particular directions.

The Member mentioned medical students. My colleague the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety will have to decide how many students he will support for medical purposes. The ripples of the report and the spending review will spread far and wide, and it is too early to tell what the full implications will be for bursaries until we see the financial package and the number of medical students that my colleague will be able to support. Any change in that will have a huge financial impact on the university.

Mr K Robinson: I thank the Minister for his response. It reminds me somewhat of the lyrics

of a song from 'Paint Your Wagon': "Where are we off to? I don't know. How are we going to get there? I haven't got a clue". To some degree, we are operating in a vacuum. Will the Minister assure the House that the consultation process that he is about to launch will cover all Lord Browne's recommendations rather than being perhaps narrowly preoccupied with one or two? Will he bear in mind the important role that further education plays already and can continue to play in the future? The Minister already gave an indication of that.

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

Our whole approach has to be integrated. I will not rise to the Member's 'Paint Your Wagon' analogy, but the consultation will not simply be on the Browne report. We will also have the Stuart report, and we will have to have our own priorities. These are reports, and it is up to the Assembly and to the elected Members to take the decisions, not Lord Browne or anyone else who writes a report. Ministers commissioned those reports to advise the Government, and we commissioned Joanne Stuart to advise the Government here. We must shape the debate in the light of our circumstances.

The Member is quite right: he knows that I have done everything in my power to protect the further education sector from the financial difficulties that are being experienced. In fact, when cuts were made at Easter and subsequently, I did not take any money off further education, simply because I believe that it is at the cutting edge of our economic development policy. Therefore, the consultation and the debates that we must have must be shaped not only by the Browne report and the Stuart report but by our priorities. That is what we are here for. We are not here simply to rubber-stamp the reports that we ask for. Reports are there to help and inform us, to enable us to have an informed debate, to provide factual information and to shine a light on a particular issue from a point of view that may not otherwise have been considered. At the end of the day, Members must go through the Lobbies and make a decision. It is, therefore, up to us to make the decisions, and we should not hide behind reports. Reports are there for our benefit and to inform us, but, ultimately, it is we who must vote in the House to decide what we are going to do.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his

statement. I wish to ask him about two elements. First, I listened to the views of Members around the Chamber on the need to ensure that access to higher education prevails for people from less well-off and lower-income backgrounds and that, in future, people from all backgrounds have access to higher education so that they can advance themselves and contribute to society. Secondly, has the Minister given any thought to any of the themes that have emerged from the Browne report? For example, has he given any thought to how students who currently attend universities in England and Wales can be retained in the North and attend local universities? Do local universities have the capacity to accommodate those students?

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

The Member raised a range of issues, including access, about which most Members asked. As I said, there is a widening access section in the Department that is led by a senior official. I am briefed regularly by that person, and, 10 or so days ago, I went to see him specifically to go through some of the issues. He is at the point of providing his first draft on the next stage in the widening access strategy. In other words, he has identified, through statistical evidence and research, pockets in which a reasonable proportion of people is still not accessing higher education. Therefore, as I said, although we have good statistics to show that progress has been made, we have still not completed the journey. It is fair to say that, depending on how this turns out, we may take a wrong turn, and, depending on how the finances work out, we may be forced into taking wrong turns. The Member knows that my Department and I are committed to this. We put our money where our mouth is.

I mentioned the Step-Up campaign, which many people and many schools want to join. People are coming to me and saying that they want to see the areas extended. I have given money to ensure that the programme is guaranteed until 2014, which is about as far ahead as I can look. Schools are knocking down the door to get into the programme, and that is positive. However, we will have to remain vigilant as we move forward.

The Member asked whether the students whom we export can be retained. The underprovision of places at Northern Ireland's universities impacts on students because it tends to raise the bar for entry qualifications. Consequently, a

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number of them leave. However, at the moment, we have a group of people — I did research on this at an early stage — whom we call “determined leavers”.

11.30 am

One of the first things that I did when I became Minister in 2007 was to ask Professor Bob Osborne to carry out research into why those people were leaving. The response was that certain courses were not available and that people think that certain universities, such as Oxbridge, the University of London, etc, have a prestige attached to them. In one sense, it is good for people to have a different vision and a different perspective. Many people, certainly in the Belfast doughnut, argue that if they go to Queen’s or the University of Ulster, they are not going away to university.

However, the whole economic picture has changed since then. If we were to look at fees around the levels that people are talking about, it would completely change the formula that we have been working on. It would have a profound impact on people’s decisions. I do not know whether capacity exists in the universities, but capacity can be created. We control the number of full-time students by the use of the maximum student number (MaSN) cap, which is a cap on student numbers purely as a financial control mechanism. If the report were read in a certain way, one could take the view that the MaSN cap is no longer required, because the MaSN cap is there to control our spending. There is no need for an MaSN cap if the income comes from the student and not from the Government. That completely changes the dynamics of the whole thing.

I suspect that, at the end of the day, the coalition will have to come to a compromise. It will be hard to envisage some Members in London voting through the Lobbies in view of the pledges that they made in other places to implement, effectively, a free market in universities. Therefore, a balance may be achieved. I have no doubt that capacity can be created, and there is certainly huge potential: there is no MaSN cap as far as part-time students are concerned. However, I have no doubt that it is there purely to control government spending where there is a balance between that and the supply. In other words, we could say that we will give the universities x million pounds to spend however they like but

that they will not get any more: if they get more students, that is up to them. Lord Mandelson did that last year as a control mechanism. He said that he was raising the MaSN cap but that he was not increasing their money. It was the usual smoke and mirrors that one comes to expect from certain politicians. Those questions will have to be asked and discussed as we move forward.

Executive Committee Business

Draft Conduct of Employment Agencies and Employment Businesses (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010

The Minister for Employment and Learning (Sir Reg Empey): I beg to move

That the draft Conduct of Employment Agencies and Employment Businesses (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010 be affirmed.

I am seeking the Assembly's approval for the Conduct of Employment Agencies and Employment Businesses (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010. I know that people have been studying the regulations from 7.30 am, in between reading Lord Browne's report, so I am sure that Members are familiar with them.

The regulations are subject to the draft affirmative procedure as laid down in the parent legislation, the Employment (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Northern Ireland) Order 1981. The regulations were laid before the Assembly in draft on 17 September and it is intended that they will come into operation on 1 December.

The regulations amend the Conduct of Employment Agencies and Employment Businesses Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005. The regulations are intended to protect the interests of those who use the services of employment agencies and employment businesses — for instance, work-seekers and hirers — and put in place the minimum standards that work-seekers and hirers can expect, such as the provision of terms and conditions, restrictions on charging fees to work-seekers, and proper handling of clients' money. The regulations also remove a number of regulatory requirements on agencies that have been deemed burdensome and unnecessary. Those are undoubted benefits, both for employers and for workers who avail themselves of the services provided by the private recruitment sector.

Employers benefit from the flexibility that agency workers bring to their businesses, particularly during seasonal fluctuations or peaks and troughs in demand. Agency work also allows companies to increase production on a temporary basis, before committing

permanently to expansion, which is particularly important during a period of economic renewal. For work-seekers, agency work can be used as a stepping stone to a permanent job, as a way of entering or re-entering the job market, or simply as a way of working more flexibly to help to balance domestic responsibilities.

The increasing use of the Internet has resulted in work-seekers making greater use of electronic job boards or e-recruitment. It is important that the law in relation to the private recruitment sector is fit for purpose and does not restrict access to job opportunities online. The flexibility and capacity for innovation that the e-recruitment sector provides as a whole will be vital to Northern Ireland's economic recovery.

The vast majority of employment agencies and businesses are reputable companies that treat work-seekers fairly, and the private recruitment sector has, on the whole, made a significant and positive contribution to the Northern Ireland economy. Recent research by my Department indicated that in 2009 approximately 270 recruitment companies were operating in Northern Ireland. The research concluded that the majority of temporary agency workers were satisfied with their employment agency, had never experienced any problems with payments and were placed in temporary employment within a few weeks of registering with an agency. I welcome those findings, but I am aware that some rogue agencies, which attempt to exploit work-seekers to gain a competitive advantage, continue to operate.

The purpose of the statutory rule is twofold. It includes deregulatory measures aimed at reducing administrative burdens on employment agencies, a move that also reflects the need to keep pace with new technology and changing business practices. The legislation also seeks to increase protection for work-seekers in the modelling and entertainment sectors, in which there is the greatest potential for exploitation. Those are the main reasons for the amending regulations that I bring before the House today.

The amending regulations will remove the requirement on employment agencies that supply work-seekers to permanent employment to carry out certain suitability checks. That change applies only to permanent workers, and it will not reduce the obligations on employment businesses that place people on temporary assignments. Currently, all employment

agencies and businesses must undertake checks on the suitability of work-seekers who are supplied for permanent and temporary recruitment. Those checks include checks on identity, experience, training, qualifications and any authorisations that the hirer requires or are required by law. However, certain checks that are required to be carried out by an employment agency are also required by law to be carried out by the hirer, resulting in an obvious duplication of effort. The regulations will remove the requirement for employment agencies to carry out suitability checks when supplying permanent work-seekers to hirers. That deregulatory measure is intended to reduce the administrative burden on such agencies, to simplify matters for work-seekers and to remove unnecessary duplication. However, statutory suitability checks will continue to be carried out by hirers.

As I mentioned earlier, the amendment will also assist electronic job boards that recruit exclusively online. In their simplest form, those job boards allow the swapping of lists of vacancies and CVs. Such agencies do not meet their clients and, therefore, do not carry out checks. Currently, the business model for those businesses makes it difficult for them to comply with the requirements. The online recruitment industry is one of the most dynamic and innovative sectors in Northern Ireland, and it is clearly not in our interest to threaten that important route to employment.

There is one important exception to the removal of suitability checks. The regulations make it clear that, in the case of an agency that intends to place workers in jobs in which they work with vulnerable people, there will be a requirement to continue to carry out those checks.

Removing all of the checks would leave gaps, potentially, in that people who work with the vulnerable in their own homes may not be covered by any checking regime. Clearly, that would be unacceptable. Protection of the vulnerable should remain paramount, although it will mean that some checks will continue to be carried out by both agency and hirer.

A further reduction of administrative burdens is the removal of the requirement for employment agencies to agree terms with work-seekers before finding them work and to do the same with hirers before agreeing to place workers with them. Those provisions add little or no value, and some respondents to the consultation felt

that the checks were significant and costly. For the work-seeker who is seeking permanent placement, agreement of terms should be with the hirer. Agreement of terms between an agency and a hirer should be purely a contractual matter.

In addition, the regulations will be amended so that job advertisements simply state whether the vacancy is temporary or permanent. That move recognises the fact that the terms “employment agency” and “employment business” can be confusing to the wider public. I am sure that Members will agree that the simpler definitions are more likely to be understood by work-seekers and hirers. I trust that Members will also agree that the regulations strike a sensible balance between the removal of unnecessary requirements and the retention of important ones.

I will now move to the additional protections that the regulations put in place for work-seekers. The regulations will provide for upfront fees to be banned altogether for photographic and fashion models. The cooling-off period of seven days will be extended to 30 days for those who are seeking work as actors, extras, singers, dancers and other performers.

In 2008, I brought a statutory rule before the Assembly that amended the conduct regulations to introduce the seven-day cooling off period for agencies charging upfront fees. That cooling-off period allowed a work-seeker to cancel or withdraw from, without detriment or penalty, any contract that sought to include their details in a publication. That was to address concerns at the time that some unscrupulous agencies were engaging in hard-sell tactics to persuade vulnerable would-be entertainers or models to pay high fees for inclusion in a publication with unrealistic promises of work. It gave the individuals seven days away from the pressure of the photographic session or studio to think about whether or not he or she wanted to proceed with the terms laid out by the agency.

In Great Britain, the Employment Agency Standards Inspectorate continues to receive a steady stream of complaints about abuse of upfront fees. Problems seem to be most prevalent in the modelling and entertainment sectors. It seems clear that the seven-day cooling off period does not provide adequate protection for those who seek work in certain sectors of the entertainment industry.

Fortunately, we, in Northern Ireland, have not seen the extent of abuses that have been experienced in Great Britain, but the potential exists. It is sensible for Northern Ireland to replicate changes in legislation in Great Britain. That will prevent any rogue agencies' attempts to move their operations to Northern Ireland, if they can no longer operate so freely in Great Britain, and ensure that people who seek work in those sectors here have the same rights and protections as people in the rest of the United Kingdom.

The ban on charging upfront fees to work-seekers will apply to those who are seeking employment as photographic or fashion models; the majority of scams are targeted at such individuals. However, it will not have a major effect on reputable agencies; they will still be able to charge commission on actual work found. The increase in the cooling-off period from seven days to 30 days will apply for work-seekers who want employment as actors, background artists, extras, musicians, singers, dancers or other performers. The regulations will also be tightened to ensure that agencies inform clients about their right to cancel; give them a draft of the information to be provided about them in a publication; and include provision for a refund if no publication is produced or circulated within 60 days.

11.45 am

The seven-day cooling-off period will remain in place for occupations relating to behind-the-scenes work, such as production staff and camera operators, as there is no evidence of abuse in those occupations. The regulations also contain anti-avoidance measures to allow entertainers a 30-day cooling-off period for additional services, including photos and audiovisual services. That is to ensure that no loopholes remain to exploit vulnerable work-seekers by providing them with expensive but worthless portfolios.

I am grateful to the Committee for Employment and Learning for its detailed scrutiny of the policy proposals and regulations. At its meeting on 29 September, the Committee recommended that they be approved by the Assembly.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning (Mrs D Kelly): I thank the Minister for bringing forward the motion to affirm the Draft Conduct of Employment Agencies

and Employment Businesses (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010.

The Committee considered the SL1 background note to the statutory rule at its meeting on 8 September and raised no issues. At its meeting on 29 September, the Committee considered the statutory rule, which, by that stage, had been laid in draft, and members offered no objections to it. The Committee has been supportive of the Minister's efforts to ensure that employment agencies and businesses are run fairly and according to the law.

The Committee supports legislation that creates fair, effective and efficient administration of those organisations and provides a system of inspection that will protect groups that could be vulnerable to exploitation. Accordingly, the Committee supports the motion. I commend the Minister for bringing it to the House.

Mr Bell: I join the Chairperson in giving full and wholehearted endorsement to a very valuable set of regulations. As I looked around the Chamber, I could not help but think that very few of us would have to pay upfront fees for modelling. As the saying goes, politics is show business for ugly people. Is the Minister fully satisfied that the protections in respect of employment agencies are as effective as they can be and that there are sufficient safeguards in the system for vulnerable people?

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

The same thought was going through my mind as I was making the statement, but I decided not to make comment on it. Nevertheless, with regard to the Member's fundamental point, I am sure that he and others have been lobbied by organisations. Let us be clear: this is not a serious problem here. It is a serious problem in Great Britain. I believe that we have a balance, wanting to remove as much regulation as we can, consistent with the protections that we believe people are entitled to receive. I am sure that Members can imagine circumstances in which a young person sees a potential for a career and goes to somebody who tells them that they will prepare a fancy portfolio, that their name and photograph will appear in a publication, and that that will be their stairway to stardom. You can see how somebody could easily be taken to the cleaners in those circumstances.

We have tried to ensure that people are protected, but we do not want to strangle

the opportunity for business to thrive. Any regulations that we impose on businesses have a negative aspect to them. It costs money to implement regulations, it takes time, and many of the businesses are small and are run by one person or a small number of people. Therefore, we do not want to intervene more than necessary, but we have a duty. The same applies to the Trading Standards Service. The principles are well-established. If people sell shoddy goods, there are rights and obligations that have to be followed. That is the nearest parallel to what we are trying to do here. It is trying to have as light a touch as possible, consistent with ensuring that people, particularly vulnerable elements, are not exploited by unscrupulous people.

We know that those people are out there. Certainly, reports from Great Britain are clear on that. The fact that that issue is not a big problem in Northern Ireland does not mean that it cannot become a problem. If somebody sees that a loophole exists here, they could be encouraged to come here to exploit it.

I am sure that Members have seen on television during the past few days that a company had offered to paint people's houses with a 15-year protection guarantee. All of a sudden, after a few months, people discovered that the paint was starting to flake off their houses. That is a classic example of the type of case for which trading standards law was introduced, that is, to ensure that there was some honesty in the system. The case of the agencies in question is similar. Quite frankly, I believe that the vast majority of agencies make a positive contribution to the Northern Ireland economy, even in that particular sector.

In response to Mr Bell, I say that the Department has struck the right balance. I appreciate the Committee's support for the implementation of those regulations.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the draft Conduct of Employment Agencies and Employment Businesses (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010 be approved.

Addendum to the Programme for Government

Mr Speaker: The next item of business is a motion from the Minister of Justice. It deals with Department of Justice matters that are to be added to the Programme for Government. I advise Members that remarks about other elements of the Programme for Government will be outside the scope of the debate. I warn Members who might be tempted to go beyond the scope of the debate that I will ask them to take their seats and I will move on to the next Member to speak. Members on all sides have been well warned.

The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to two hours for the debate. The Minister will have 10 minutes in which to propose the motion and 15 minutes in which to make his winding-up speech. All other Members who wish to speak will have five minutes.

The Minister of Justice (Mr Ford): I beg to move

That the addendum to the Programme for Government for the Department of Justice, as agreed by the Executive, be approved.

It gives me great pleasure to move the motion, which stands in my name, on behalf of the Executive. Although the devolution of policing and justice powers was an important step forward in the peace process and the political process, I believe that we will be judged by how this Assembly and Executive carry out their responsibilities for the benefit of all the people of Northern Ireland.

Unfortunately, events of recent weeks are a harsh reminder that there are people in the community who do not want to see devolution working. However, that cannot distract us. Therefore, I am pleased to bring the addendum to the Assembly to demonstrate formally that devolution is making a difference. I am also pleased to launch a consultation on new sentencing guidelines mechanisms, which is one of the priority actions in the addendum. However, I will return to that in a few moments.

The addendum, which has been circulated to Members, sets out the Department of Justice's priorities. In line with the remaining period of the Programme for Government, it focuses on the current financial year and sets out the foundation for an agenda for change that will impact in the longer term. I am grateful to

colleagues on the Committee for Justice and in the Executive for their helpful comments and contributions.

The Hillsborough Castle Agreement required the Minister of Justice to draft an addendum to the Programme for Government for the Department of Justice. The agreement states that the addendum should be a:

“seamless fit into the current PfG”

that would be developed collaboratively with officials from other relevant departments. It continued:

“Confidence, avoidable delay, rehabilitation, recidivism and the interests of victims and witnesses”

should be “key elements” of the addendum, as well as policies that support effective policing.

Building safer communities requires joined-up working across government. Therefore, the views of other Departments have been incorporated in the addendum.

The Hillsborough Castle Agreement also indicated actions that the Department's agreed policies could usefully include. A number of topics were listed, including a code of practice for victims; tribunal reform; public legal services; a sentencing guidelines council; a review of prisons; and a strategy for the management of offenders. I am pleased to confirm that all those actions have been reflected in the addendum.

The current Executive set themselves an overarching aim to build a peaceful, fair and prosperous society in Northern Ireland, where there is respect for the rule of law and where everyone can enjoy a better quality of life now and in the years to come.

The justice priorities outlined in the addendum very much reinforce that overall strategic aim. Although actions have been identified for the lifetime of the current Programme for Government, the underlying themes will help set a justice agenda for the future.

Members will appreciate that it is not possible to incorporate all the Department's activities into 15 key goals, but, in broad terms, they underpin a strategic framework for reforming and reshaping the justice system in Northern Ireland. The goals have been brigaded under five broad themes: reducing offending and

dealing with its consequences; building safer communities; increasing access to justice; supporting justice in a shared future; and resourcing and supporting delivery across the justice system.

I want to say just a few words about those goals, as time does not permit me to speak about them in detail. As the actions need to be achieved by March next year, work has already commenced on a number of fronts; indeed, it is well under way on a number of fronts. For example, one of the key goals is to develop new legislation, and I intend to introduce a justice Bill to the Assembly next week. The content of the draft Bill has already been shared with the Justice Committee. It will improve community safety, enhance our services to victims and witnesses, and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the justice system.

On 13 September, I announced a fundamental review of public legal services, which is another key goal. That review will address from first principles the question of how best to help people secure access to justice and will focus particularly on whether there are better ways of resolving disputes, including approaches that do not require court action.

Work is also well advanced on developing a new code of practice for victims, and I hope to launch a consultation document soon. The intention is to improve services to those directly affected by crime, and that is in addition to the guides that I published shortly after I was appointed Minister.

To reduce offending and deal with its consequences, work has already commenced on developing a strategy for reducing offending. That approach will link in other Departments to ensure a co-ordinated response and to deliver the added value from joined-up working.

A fundamental and thorough review of prisons is already under way to review the conditions of detention, management and oversight of prisons. That review, led by Dame Anne Owers, will inform and provide the impetus for a strategic efficiency and effectiveness programme to design a new model to transform the delivery of prison services.

Devolution also provides the freedom and opportunity to set new long-term policing objectives for Northern Ireland. Retaining the current long-term objectives, as determined by a

previous direct rule Secretary of State, would be a wasted opportunity.

However, I am not only focused on the here and now. We need to address the longer-term, more strategic context in which we are operating, so new long-term policing objectives will be agreed by next March.

Finally, the Hillsborough agreement specifically proposed that the establishment of a sentencing guidelines council would be considered for Northern Ireland. Therefore, I am pleased to announce to the House that I am meeting that commitment by publishing a consultation paper on a sentencing guidelines mechanism. The consultation document presents three options: the establishment of an independent sentencing guidelines council; an independent sentencing advisory panel; and a mechanism for sentencing guidelines based on measures already being taken by the Lord Chief Justice to enhance the guidelines currently available to sentencers.

Members will be aware of the work being done by the Lord Chief Justice, which he set out in his speech at the start of the legal term. His speech identified possible priority areas and invited public comment. It is clear that sentencing in any individual case is and must remain a matter for the judiciary, but sometimes public expectations exceed what may be appropriate in an individual case. I believe that public confidence in sentencing is fundamental to an effective criminal justice system, so the consultation seeks views on the role that a guidelines mechanism might play in enhancing public confidence, transparency, consistency and community engagement in sentencing.

Appended to the addendum, for convenience, is the Department of Justice's contributions to public service agreements (PSAs), which will be integrated with existing PSAs for the current Programme for Government. They cover a number of areas, including tackling organised crime; increasing public confidence and victim and witness satisfaction in the justice system; making arrangements to transfer tribunals to the Department of Justice; and ensuring that the necessary forensic science capacity is in place to support an effective justice system.

Underpinning all the work of the Department will be a focus on building a shared future. The justice system can play a positive part in helping to build that shared future, working in

co-operation with others, and the Department of Justice will develop policies and strategies to support the Executive's wider strategy.

My Department is working with other Departments already, and, in particular, I value the engagement between the Department of Justice, the Police Service and the Department for Social Development in working on how we tackle problems in some particularly disadvantaged areas.

12.00 noon

Although the addendum sets out priorities for action in the short term, it also provides a framework for a longer-term agenda for change. Progress has been made on a number of key goals already, and I will be making more announcements on new policies and initiatives over the next few weeks and months. Those will include details of the youth justice review; publication of a strategy for the management of women offenders; and changes to the mental health legislation, with a wider review also taking place. The final initiative flows from the Bamford report, which is led by DHSSPS, but Department of Justice officials are working with health colleagues on ensuring that that comes into play.

Although the justice system will need to live within its available resources, important work on delivering speedier justice and providing support for victims will continue. I believe that we have a challenging agenda, but the addendum provides an important framework for a justice system that meets the needs of the people of Northern Ireland in the immediate future of this programme and as we seek to build for the future. The consultation on the sentencing guidelines mechanism that is commencing today is a further practical example of how the goals outlined in the addendum become a reality and deliver the benefits of devolution for all our community.

The addendum is the result of widespread collaboration and co-operation. It is based on input, not only from the Department of Justice but from other Departments and from the Justice Committee. It builds on the Hillsborough agreement, and it builds further on proposals that my party put forward and discussed with others around the time of those Hillsborough meetings. I have great pleasure in commending it to the House.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Justice

(Lord Morrow): The Committee for Justice has considered the Department of Justice addendum to the Programme for Government on several occasions over the past number of months, and, at our meeting on 9 September, we agreed that we broadly support it. However, the Committee has expressed disappointment that some of the targets do not appear to be particularly stretching. I will return to that point shortly.

The Justice Committee first considered the Department of Justice draft addendum to the Programme for Government at meetings on 24 June and 1 July. At those meetings, the Committee identified issues with the draft addendum with which it was not content and which, it believed, needed to be addressed before the addendum would be fit for purpose.

Among the issues raised by the Committee was a concern that some of key goals were not strategic enough. The use of percentages and the absence of baseline information in relation to setting key goals made it extremely difficult to assess what the goals represented in delivery terms and whether they were realistic, too ambitious or not sufficiently stretching. The Committee was also concerned that at least one of the goals had already been achieved. There was also an absence of information on how the goals were to be achieved. The Minister of Justice accepted the points raised by the Committee, and further work was carried out by the Department during the summer to revise and improve the draft addendum to ensure that it better reflected the key strategic aims and goals to improve the justice system.

A revised addendum to the Programme for Government, which the Minister of Justice has presented for approval by the Assembly today, was presented to the Justice Committee on 9 September. Following further consideration and discussion, the Committee has agreed to broadly support it, as I indicated earlier, and the key strategic aims of building safer communities in Northern Ireland, delivering greater access to the justice system and reducing offending and dealing with its consequences. However, the Committee is disappointed that some of the targets, particularly those in relation to key goal 11 — to reduce the number of non-domestic violence with injury crimes — and key goal 12 — to reduce the number of recorded antisocial behaviour incidents — are not more ambitious. The Committee also noted that at least one of

the targets set by the Department is dependent on the level of reporting of crime by the public and raised concerns regarding whether that method of setting targets would provide a true reflection of what was being achieved, given that the level of reporting crime could fluctuate widely. The setting of targets and the measurement of their achievement is likely to be an area that the Committee for Justice will wish to keep under review and return to in due course.

The Committee considered the content of the Department of Justice's addendum to the Programme for Government in detail and is now broadly content with the document presented to the Assembly. It represents an ambitious programme of work that will be difficult to deliver within the set timescales. The Justice Bill is a large piece of legislation to bring through the Assembly within a tight timescale. The Committee for Justice intends not only to scrutinise the individual policies in the addendum to the Programme for Government but to monitor closely the Department's progress in delivering the overall programme and its goals and targets.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabh mo leithscéal as a bheith mall. Tá mé sásta go bhfuil an addendum seo os ár gcomhair inniu. Mr Speaker, I apologise to you and the Minister for being late. I am sure that I did not miss anything of which we had prior notice.

We welcome the addendum to the Programme for Government. It is appropriate and timely. The Chairperson outlined a number of the concerns that were raised in Committee, so I will not itemise them.

The addendum to the Programme for Government will provide an opportunity for us to improve the way in which the justice system works. It will give accountability to the wider public, and it should provide a sense of ownership to people so that solutions that the Department of Justice comes up with will be relevant to those who live in the North. In all such situations, opportunity is one thing, but delivery is the main issue, which is what people will focus on. What we and the addendum to the Programme for Government are trying to do is good and well researched, but we must now ensure that it is delivered. We must ensure that the system and process of verifying that is not simply down to the Department or the

scrutiny Committee but stretches across everyone involved in the criminal justice system, including victims and many other people. When we do that, we will be able to ascertain whether opportunities have been realised. We have to learn, and the process should not remain fixed.

The Chairperson outlined a number of targets. I am not going to detail the targets, but, where evidence is produced that shows that the targets are not ambitious enough, the Department should take steps to ensure that any targets that it sets in the future will be realised and verifiable.

The addendum to the Programme for Government will allow confidence to be built up in every aspect of policing and justice. If what is being promised is delivered, it should speed up justice and access to justice. The Criminal Justice Inspection's report 'Avoidable Delay' is also timely. The Committee heard evidence about better co-operation between the many agencies involved in bringing about prosecutions, and, if some of the recommendations made by the Criminal Justice Inspection are delivered, we should see better results on avoidable delay in the future.

The issue concerns better access to justice. Access to justice has been criticised in times past, and the programme, as outlined by the Minister, will allow better access. His addendum details innovative improvements, and, if they are delivered, most people will welcome them. The Committee discussed the provision of legal aid and the impact that that will have on representation. Having listened to many of the evidence sessions, I think that there is a focus on ensuring that people have good representation so that access is not denied according to a person's ability to be granted or not granted legal aid.

There are two things that I would like to cover. The Hillsborough agreement promised a review of prison management and detention and the steps to establish a review team. Sinn Féin met the members of the review team. I have no doubt that they realise the challenge that they face but are going about it in a professional and objective way. However, the important things for us are opportunity and delivery, and the challenge begins when the review group makes its recommendations. Too often, we have had reports on various aspects of the justice

system, but the challenge of delivery was not taken up as much as it should have been.

The other aspect to welcome is the Justice Bill. The Minister is ready to present that to the Committee, and the Committee will go through the various stages. Many aspects of the Bill will tease out our ability, which goes back to the opportunities that the addendum provides. The Justice Bill will be one of those testing grounds.

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

Mr McCartney: The party welcomes the addendum and looks forward to the challenges that we face.

Mr Elliott: I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak on the addendum to the Programme for Government and to raise matters that go to the very core of the community. We are all aware that much reform is needed across the criminal justice system, and even the Minister accepts some of that. The addendum will be a start to that reform process.

I am pleased to see that the Justice Minister is giving due prominence to the role of victims and witnesses. The least that we can do for those involved in legal processes through no fault of their own is to ease their passage through the system. I am aware of the impact that giving evidence can have on victims and witnesses, including secondary trauma. I welcome all moves to make their well-being central to the justice process. That is particularly important for children and vulnerable and intimidated adult victims and witnesses. Aside from our responsibility for their welfare, it is important to recognise that those who offer testimony are vital to the justice process. If they are discouraged from participating, our ability to deal with offenders and criminality is severely diminished. Organisations such as Victim Support provide a valuable support to victims throughout the criminal justice process, and I pay tribute to their work in safeguarding the rights and needs of victims.

I am disappointed by a lack of specific targets to reduce the time taken to progress cases. Unfortunately, avoidable delay is a distinct feature of the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland. Not only does that impact on public perception and confidence, it is also incredibly wasteful. Alleged offenders spend longer than they should in prison on remand

waiting for their trial, with a resultant cost to the public purse. The criminal justice inspectorate published a report into avoidable delays some time ago. To my knowledge, little has improved, and all the time the impact on the public purse is growing unsustainably. That needs to be addressed with an increased appetite by the Justice Minister to improve efficiency and increase overall confidence in the system.

I will be interested to see how the Department of Justice will interact with the shared future agenda, particularly in light of the much-publicised inadequacies of the CSI strategy. The only way forward on equality is to create a genuinely pluralist and integrationist society built on respect for all our traditions. The Ulster Unionist Party reiterates our need to create a genuine CSI strategy for Northern Ireland.

I welcome the key goal to build a safer community by reducing the number of non-domestic violence-with-injury crimes by 5%. The chief aim of any criminal justice system is to make communities safer. However, I am concerned that there are no targets relating to domestic violence. The PSNI responds to a domestic abuse call-out every 23 minutes, yet targeting domestic violence is not specified as a key goal. My colleague Michael McGimpsey has spearheaded specific reform through the Tackling Violence at Home strategy, and we need to take corporate action against the prevalence of domestic violence in Northern Ireland. I look forward to hearing the Minister's reassurance that he will not allow domestic violence to slip down his justice agenda.

It is regrettable that it will be difficult to meet the targets in such a short period, but the Ulster Unionist Party will continue to engage positively with the criminal justice agenda in order to best serve all the people of Northern Ireland.

12.15 pm

Mr A Maginness: I support the motion. As far as the SDLP is concerned, the addendum is welcome. There is little in it with which one can disagree. It is like motherhood and apple pie: one always approves of such things. The addendum may be rich in aspiration and poor in application, but I hope it is not. It remains to be seen whether this part of the Programme for Government will be fully and properly implemented.

I have listened to Lord Morrow and other colleagues who mentioned targets. Their criticism is that the targets are not good enough et cetera. My view is that it is difficult to set targets in this area of government. If I am affected by crime, even as a single victim, I am nevertheless deeply affected by it. I do not think that we can measure the effectiveness of the system through targets. One can do so in other areas of government; for example, capital expenditure. However, it is difficult to do so in this area. I say that by way of observation.

We have a continuing and increasing threat from paramilitaries, and I hope that that will not undermine the tremendous work that has been done in policing in Northern Ireland. It is a threat to the security of us all, but I hope it does not undermine the great progress that we have made in policing, the establishment of community policing, the reforms of the Police Service and other progress made in that respect.

The programme rightly emphasises young people at risk, and the SDLP is very supportive of measures that can increase protection for such young people.

We also want to see full implementation of the prison reform programme. I am aware of the work of the Minister's review team, and I am impressed by those who are conducting the review. It is a central issue, and we need to see real reform of the Prison Service, including improved opportunities for the rehabilitation of prisoners and addressing their skills and educational deficits. That makes sense. If we rehabilitate prisoners, we reduce reoffending and enrich people's lives. That is good for society. We must also address prisoners' mental health problems and take that issue very seriously. There are many people in prison who are suffering from mental health problems and personality disorders. We have to bring resources to bear on those problems.

It is right and proper that we have a strategy for women offenders to address offending behaviour, and we should seriously examine and advance the case for a new women's facility. That is an important aim. We must also seek alternatives to prison and deal with the ridiculous situation whereby fine defaulters are imprisoned. We must find alternatives to that. We must deal with delay, because delays in our judicial system increase the number of

prisoners on remand, which puts greater stress on the management of our prison estate.

I am disappointed that there is not a greater emphasis on North/South co-operation in the addendum.

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

Mr A Maginness: It is essential, given the common threats and problems in relation to crime, that we have —

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Mr A Maginness: We must have a deeper North/South dimension to justice.

Dr Farry: I welcome the debate and, hopefully, the eventual passage of this addendum to the Programme for Government. The Alliance Party has always maintained that the devolution of policing and justice was more than just a simple act that occurred in April. It was part of a process, and, in many respects, the real work has now begun. What happened before was high politics; it is now about demonstrating to the people of Northern Ireland how putting accountability and decision-making in local hands can really make a difference to people's lives. In many respects, the real prize of devolution is the ability to have joined-up government with other Departments and agencies. This Programme for Government addendum will begin that process, which we will hopefully see deepened in the months and years to come.

The requirement for an addendum to the Programme for Government may have been referred to and required by the Hillsborough agreement, but the Alliance Party has always viewed it as being central to the devolution of policing and justice, certainly since well before the time of the agreement. Even though we are now only months away from a new, all-embracing Programme for Government, this debate is far from an academic exercise. It is a useful stocktake of where we are and where we are going. It is also an opportunity for a wider debate on justice issues. This is about much more than motherhood and apple pie; it is a real, solid piece of work that addresses the real issues facing the people of Northern Ireland.

Criminal justice issues are not just for the Department of Justice; they are genuinely cross-cutting issues. A lot can be done through the Department of Justice, but real outcomes,

particularly in managing offenders and reducing offending, will require inputs from a range of agencies and Departments, whether that is the Department of Education, the Department for Employment and Learning, the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety or, if the outcome relates to housing, the Department for Social Development.

It is important that we understand how to measure the success of an effective criminal justice system. For me, success is not about how many people are in prison or how many we convict through the court system, important though efficiency in the courts is. The real standard that we have to judge by is how people in the community feel. Do they feel safe? Do they think that crime is falling? Do they feel secure in their home and on the streets? When we know that, we will know whether we are making a real difference to people's lives.

As a liberal, I think it is important that we focus on the individual; that is the victim, the witness and, at times, the perpetrator. It is also important that we tackle any sense of impunity in our system, whether that comes from expediency on the part of certain actors in the system or the threats and current reality of paramilitarism and organised crime in our society and its impact on people's lives.

It is important that we do not see the criminal justice system in narrow terms or as individual agencies doing their bit in silos. We have to view the criminal justice system as being joined up, a single entity. It must be more than simply a spectrum with a crime at one end and someone going to prison at the other. We have to view the criminal justice system as a circle — hopefully, a virtuous circle. What happens in prison can have a bigger impact on community safety than many other interventions. That relates to what we do to rehabilitate offenders and ensure that, when they leave prison, they can return to a normal life and not become repeat offenders.

I will highlight a number of the key areas in the addendum. The issue of a shared future is central to everything that we do in this society. I emphasise that justice is a key actor in that respect. The key contribution that can be made is moving on the debate in this society. In the past, people almost had a sense of security through separation, which has had so many social and economic consequences. We need to reframe that debate and to help people to

have a sense of security through sharing. It is important that we look at how we can use the justice system to support other efforts, such as bringing down peace walls and tackling interfaces. Other areas are also important, such as tackling avoidable delay, the integrity of sentencing in respect of public confidence and the support that we give to victims and witnesses. Hopefully, we can return to those issues in future months.

Mr Givan: I support the motion. It is significant that we are bringing forward an addendum to the Programme for Government and that we have a local Minister who is responsible and whom we can hold to account to take it forward. Do I have absolute confidence in David Ford? No, I do not. Do I have confidence that he will do a better job than a direct rule Minister? Absolutely.

The Chairman referred to the targets in the addendum to the Programme for Government. The Committee for Justice has discussed those. We do not find everything in the addendum to be particularly stretching, but we are prepared to give the Minister a fair wind. There is a role to be played in identifying real targets that are stretching and challenging. I think that the Minister will agree that the target of 38% confidence in the effectiveness of the justice system is not one that the public will find particularly stretching. I recognise that we are coming from a low baseline, but the Assembly and the Executive need to vastly increase public confidence in the effectiveness of our justice system in Northern Ireland.

I am pleased that a key goal relates to victims. The victims of crime and how they are dealt with, handled, communicated with and informed should be to the centre of any justice system. I welcome that inclusion.

The addendum also touches on the offender management scheme. Let me be clear: if there are prisoners who can be reformed so that they do not commit crimes once they are released from prison, I am all up for their rehabilitation and ensuring that they go back out into the community and do not re-enter prison. We have a system in which repeat offenders are constantly churned round. If we can address that and reform those individuals, I am up for that. However, when people go to prison, they are not there for any good that they have done. The public expect prisoners to be punished. Some prisoners are beyond rehabilitation and

cannot be reformed. We must have an effective prison management system that implements a system of punishment for those prisoners. Not everyone can be reformed. I am all up for the reformation of prisoners, but let us remember why they are there in the first place. They are there to be punished. We should not lose sight of that.

Mr Campbell: I thank the Member for giving way. I am glad that he is elaborating in the way in which he is. It is not a case of either/or; there are those who, all the circumstances and information indicate, are beyond the pale, and they must be punished. However, there are prisoners who can be rehabilitated and are not a threat to society, and that should be pursued as well. It is not a case of either/or, and he is quite rightly pointing that out. Does he agree that we need to see that development? There needs to be punishment on one hand and rehabilitation on the other so that prisoners get the message that, if they are rehabilitated, there is a future for them.

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

Mr Givan: Thank you, Mr Speaker. The Member makes exactly that point very well. I was in Maghaberry prison last week — as a visitor, I hasten to add — and saw at first hand prison officers working with prisoners. They help to identify prisoners as people who can be reformed, and they work with them to give them skills. They do an excellent job. That type of work needs to be taken forward, but the Member makes an important point: there are prisoners who need to be punished. Let us remember why they are in prison.

Dr Farry: Will the Member give way?

Mr Givan: No. I want to continue, if you do not mind. I am sorry, Mr Farry.

Mention was made of fine defaulters. The point has been made to me that there are people who go to prison for failing to pay their TV licence. What is the first thing that they get when they go to prison? A TV. Therefore, some prisoner categories are nonsense, and the policy of jailing fine defaulters must be looked at in order to take individuals who should not be in the prison system out of the system. I actually think that imprisonment lets them off the hook too easily. However, other prisoners should be detained for longer. We need to get the balance right.

Stephen Farry said that we got to this point as part of the process of high politics, and that is correct. Up to this point, high politics was at stake, and my party worked hard to ensure that the conditions for the devolution of policing and justice were got right. We ensured that it never reached the point where individuals and a party that we would never support got the justice post, and the Alliance Party got that post. We undid some of the damage. I welcome the Ulster Unionist Party's commitment now to positively engage with the criminal justice system. That party did damage in 2005 by allowing the possible passage towards that post of an individual and a party that we could not have supported. However, we have got the conditions right. We are now working on the detail. We need to put in place a system in which the public will have confidence. We will play our role in trying to help to build that confidence.

Mr Speaker: The Business Committee has arranged to meet immediately upon lunchtime suspension. I, therefore, propose, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until 2.00 pm, when the next Member to speak will be Carál Ní Chuilín.

The sitting was suspended at 12.31pm

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

2.00 pm

Ms Ní Chuilín: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. It is opportune that the Minister brought to my attention the fact that Raymond McCartney was late to the Chamber. Before the Minister pre-empts me, I put on record that Raymond McCartney was at another meeting on, by the way, justice-related matters. Therefore, rather than allow him to be scalded, I apologise on his behalf.

So far, the debate has been fairly rounded, particularly given that so many challenging work-related issues were raised in the Committee for Justice. Given the backdrop to the addendum at Hillsborough, bedding it down during scrutiny will be a challenge for us all. Some themes and areas of concern have been covered, but, when we have the opportunity to subject the addendum to proper scrutiny, there should be less politicking and more detail should be forthcoming. Nevertheless, we welcome the addendum to the Programme for Government and the opportunity to debate it.

I want to cover a couple of issues. I put on record some of what was said in Committee. Like other Members, although possibly in respect of different PSA targets, I believe that some targets are under-ambitious rather than overambitious. Pardon the pun, but we do not want to play safe; we want to get it right for everybody. On the other hand, we do not want to set unrealistic targets. Without fear of contradiction, I want to get that clear.

Raymond mentioned the review that is under way in the jails. I do not wish to pre-empt the outcome of the review, but it is important to put on record that there is already a need for statutory powers for the Prisoner Ombudsman. The Committee has already fed into the review and made representation to that team. In the addendum, under the heading "Reducing offending and dealing with the consequences", I was glad to see a role for restorative justice, because if the issue is reducing offending and the prevention of crime — Alban Maginness mentioned young people at risk — early intervention and some sort of agreement about restorative justice will help to keep many people, particularly young people, out of the criminal justice system.

I want to touch on the perceptions associated with safer communities. The amalgamation of district policing partnerships and community safety partnerships is one way in which better integration could be envisaged. The Bamford review was mentioned earlier in relation to the mental health of prisoners, and the opportunity that integration could offer in the area of community safety must not be missed. That would encompass the community, statutory involvement and the whole criminal justice family.

Three work areas are important: real partnerships; proper engagement in which people feel that there has been real participation; and, above all else, delivery, which is the area about which we received most complaints when we conducted inter-agency meetings in north Belfast. It is not good enough for politicians and statutory bodies to turn up at meetings and call that participation. What happens at such meetings is all about outcomes and delivery, and there is still a lot of work for us to do.

My party supports the independence of the judiciary and the courts. However, that does not mean that they cannot be removed or excluded from accountability. When people talk about perceptions of safety, they mention topics such as repeat offenders getting bail. However, we will touch on that when we scrutinise the addendum in Committee. Nevertheless, there are real issues that people want us to debate in the Assembly.

I support the motion, welcome the opportunity for debate and look forward to hearing the rest of the contributions.

Mr Spratt: I thank the Minister for his statement. I welcome the fact that one of the first issues to be addressed in the addendum is the recognition that the first duty of any Government is to provide for the safety of their citizens. It is now incumbent on the Executive, given the serious dissident threat not only in Northern Ireland but in the rest of the United Kingdom, to make every effort to ensure that the budgets for the PSNI and for security are maintained and that police numbers are maintained. That needs to be foremost on the Executive's agenda and on that of the national Government.

I want to make a couple of points about community confidence and community policing. I welcome the fact that the addendum has recognised the great efforts that have been

made to increase community policing in Northern Ireland. That is an important bulwark and framework for the future of the Province, and it is important not to set it back in any way. I welcome the fact that the Chief Constable intends to release more police officers from desk duties to front line duties and, in turn, to community policing.

It is incumbent on the Department of Justice and on the Executive to ensure that policing bureaucracy be reduced. The Government should look at that at a national level to ensure that the police have less need to provide what has in the past, perhaps, been seen as unnecessary statistical information just for the purpose of keeping certain departments, policing boards and other bodies in existence. Such work uses up resources and is manpower-intensive — and woman-power intensive, to be totally inclusive — and I welcome the fact that those issues have been recognised. I hope that the Department will work with the Police Service and others in that regard.

The addendum recognises that legislation is to be introduced to deal with district policing partnerships and community safety partnerships. The Department needs to look seriously at the existing process of establishing district policing partnerships. I know that it has been important to have had that process in place, but although district policing partnerships now cost in excess of £3.5 million a year, that is only part of the bill. District councils throughout Northern Ireland pay the other 25%. The figure is, perhaps, closer to £5 million a year rather than £3.5 million. Some of that money could be better spent on front line policing. There are opportunities now to deal with some of those issues.

It is also critical that the Department look at the role of the Policing Board, which costs some £10 million a year. We must ensure that the Department properly polices the Policing Board. The amount of money spent needs to be policed, given our economic situation.

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

Mr Spratt: I hope that all the issues that I have mentioned will be looked at in the round. I welcome the addendum and support what the Department of Justice will do in the future.

Mr Kennedy: I thank the Minister of Justice for bringing the proposals to the House today. He

will be aware of the Justice Committee's long-standing concerns about the content of his Department's addition to the Programme for Government. A number of the addendum's key goals have specific and binding targets, and I hope that the Department can meet, or come close to meeting, them before March 2011.

I am pleased that one of the objectives contained in the addendum is to support efforts to reduce organised crime. Two weeks ago, the Ulster Unionist Party proposed a motion in the House that called on everyone to make Northern Ireland a hostile place for human traffickers. We, as a party, want to ensure that human trafficking remains high on the Justice Minister's agenda. I am slightly disappointed, therefore, that there is only passing mention of a wish to increase the recovery of proceeds of crime in Northern Ireland, but no details of a specific target. It is vital that, as we make Northern Ireland a hostile place for human traffickers, we pursue their criminal assets. Asset recovery is an important means by which we can punish the perpetrators of those despicable crimes and hit them where it will hurt, namely through their finances. Without profit, the incentive to use Northern Ireland as a trafficking marketplace will reduce significantly.

I am also pleased that the addendum mentions a consultation paper on sentencing guidelines. I am aware that, last week, the Office of the Lord Chief Justice published a provisional list of areas to consider, including domestic violence, people trafficking and attacks on workers and more vulnerable people. Sentencing must act as a deterrent and should express societal condemnation of offensive and destructive acts, and I am pleased that our judiciary is responsive to genuine public concerns and is open to listening to them. I continue to recognise the integrity of judicial independence, and I look forward to seeing what emerges from the consultation.

Each year, about 80,000 people receive legal aid in Northern Ireland, and, as of last year, the total bill was approximately £103 million. The Minister is seeking to drive that cost down. In Northern Ireland, there will continue to be challenges ahead for those who wish to access publicly funded legal aid services. However, we must examine whether a more efficient and targeted legal aid service could provide new opportunities to deliver for those most in need.

I particularly note the review of prisons that is mentioned in the addendum. I am aware that, in light of the two prisoners' recent escape from custody, the Prison Service is undertaking an additional review. Perhaps the Justice Minister could, during his closing address, provide an update on where that matter rests and assure the House that he will put robust measures in place immediately, even prior to the completion of the review later this month.

The addendum will supplement the current Programme for Government. If we look at the Executive's main Programme for Government, which was published with a great fanfare in 2008, we quickly realise that the Executive are not on track to meet a significant number of their core targets. In light of the changed circumstances that face Northern Ireland, my party has consistently called for the Programme for Government to be revised and to be made fit for purpose. We consistently highlighted the weaknesses of the current programme, and the Minister proved today that it is possible to reform the Programme for Government. It is a great shame that certain parties in the Executive have refused to countenance responsive government in Northern Ireland.

2.15 pm

Mr McDevitt: My friend and colleague Alban Maginness concluded his remarks by expressing regret that there was not a single mention of North/South co-operation in the addendum to the Programme for Government. That is a good place for me to start. We know that the Minister has busied himself building cross-border relationships. We support him fully in those actions, and we welcome his determination to ensure that working relationships on this island and, indeed, across these islands, are strong and solid.

However, we need to go a step further. We must understand, as unionist Prime Minister Brian Faulkner understood many years ago, that there may be a case for an all-island intelligence service. Those are not my words, but his. Those conversations should be happening today. As colleagues in the House know, it is a matter of record that the SDLP does not believe that the current arrangements for intelligence in this region are acceptable. The lack of capacity for those arrangements to be accountable to the Minister of Justice is a major omission, not only from the settlement on policing and justice but

from the Programme for Government. Therefore, I call on us all to reflect on Mr Faulkner's words and ambitions.

I agree with Mr Spratt we all face a significant threat, whether we are British Irish, Irish Irish, Ulster Irish or Northern Irish, from a tiny minority of our countrymen and countrywomen who seem determined to drag us back to the past. We share the ambition to meet that threat, so perhaps we should be thinking when we write the next —

Mr Spratt: Will the Member give way?

Mr McDevitt: Yes, of course.

Mr Spratt: Does the honourable Member agree that there has always been cross-border co-operation on policing, intelligence and other areas throughout the ages, prior to, and during the days of, the RUC? That continues to this day, and, in fact, North/South and east-west relationships are mentioned in the final paragraph of the document.

Mr McDevitt: I do not disagree with Mr Spratt. However, it is time to make that co-operation accountable. Although the policing aspects of it are accountable, the security aspects are not. As we have said previously in other contexts in the Chamber, that is a matter of regret for the SDLP.

The opportunity exists to expand the scope of the prison review to make it a fundamental review of prisons. In the past couple of weeks, the Minister, through no fault of his own, has been in the unfortunate situation of having to come to the Chamber with serious news about the ability of prisons to meet the needs of society in 2010. Again, I do not detect any great disagreement across the House on the need to review fundamentally how prisons are run, the prison culture, the terms and conditions under which prison employees are expected to work and the services that we expect them to provide. I ask the Minister to reflect on the terms of reference that he provided to Dame Anne Owers and, perhaps, to give her the opportunity to do what many of us believe that she must be able to do, which is to review fundamentally the role and nature of the Prison Service in this region.

The Minister talked about a shared society, and, only two weeks ago, I was pleased to be able to join him, colleagues from his party and colleagues from the Ulster Unionist Party in the

Lobbies in expressing opposition to the cohesion, sharing and integration strategy in its current form. I also acknowledge Mr Elliott's remarks in that regard earlier in the debate.

It is important that, in the Minister's summation, we hear a clear determination to set a much higher goal than that set by the CSI strategy for a shared society and that, as the Alliance Party's representative in the Executive, we hear of his determination to continue to put true reconciliation at the heart of everything that we do. Those who are most marginalised in society are most likely to come into frequent contact with the criminal justice system, not necessarily because of what they have done but because of the circumstances into which they were born. It is important that we hear the Minister acknowledge the connection, as I think he will concede exists, between those individuals and poverty.

There is also a connection between those individuals and the most segregated communities in our region. A failure to recognise those connections and that segregation can be, and has been, a contributory factor to social exclusion. We must understand that failure so that we can tackle criminal justice challenges in the generations ahead and build a better future for our young people.

In the brief time that is available to me, I will conclude by talking about young people. It is wrong that we imprison minors in this part of Ireland; it is not right. No other place that we respect does that. I hope that the Minister will clearly indicate his determination to ensure that that practice ceases.

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

Mr McDevitt: We are happy, as are most of our colleagues, to support the addendum.

Mr O'Dowd: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The addendum to the Programme for Government states:

"Critical to all the reform of policing and justice in recent years has been a focus on building community confidence."

That is key and central to our approach to the addendum, to the justice procedure, to the policing procedure and, indeed, to the entire Executive.

For too long and for too many years, the only experience that many people in the nationalist and republican communities had of the justice system was that it was a tool of repression and oppression. We must never allow ourselves to slip back into those times. As we start this journey of dealing directly with justice issues on a daily basis, which is a new experience for many, if not all, in the Chamber, we must focus on the fact that we need to create a system that everyone feels comfortable with and can buy in to and that is accountable and independent. We require the justice system to be independent from political interference but, alas, not from political accountability. That is because, at the end of the day, we are politicians and we are the people in this legislature who make the laws that govern society.

This point has been touched on previously, but if we are to move forward, we need to recognise that, although devolution in itself was an event, the devolution of justice is not. We are involved in a building process. The first few months since the devolution of policing and justice have been tentative, but I think that we have got off to a good start. Fresh ideas are coming from the Justice Minister and the Justice Department. Just as important, the Justice Committee, which meets weekly, is doing a good job. In fact, I must declare an interest as a member of that Committee. As a collective body, the Justice Committee has hit the ground running. It has scrutinised, in detail, the Justice Department's work and has assisted the Department in developing a programme of work.

Each of the political parties in the Chamber may have different views on what should be in the addendum to the Programme for Government. The document is simply a starting point for rebuilding, reshaping and modernising a justice system that, for far too long, had no accountability whatsoever. A number of areas in the addendum require immediate and effective proposals to be made. We have heard discussions about the prison system and the reasons why people end up in jails and in custody. I concur with Mr McDevitt's comments about young people: minors should not be in jail. We should not have such scenarios. However, we are not only locking up minors but we are leaving them in jail with no proper care or treatment. At times, we are leaving them in jail with staff who are not properly trained to deal with minors. All those areas need immediate attention.

If I may touch on the broader prison population, the percentage of that population suffering from mental health problems is alarming. Although those people may have committed crimes against society and against individuals and have gone through the judicial process, we, as a caring society, have to ask ourselves why they have ended up in the criminal system. If, as has happened in many of those cases, we, as a society, have let down those people at an earlier stage in their lives and have not put in place proper procedures to deal with the many conflicts that are going on in young people's lives, we are in one sense guilty of a crime ourselves.

Justice cannot sit at the Executive table as an individual Ministry, and I know that the Justice Minister is not advocating that. If we are to have a successful justice system, we need the Justice Minister to sit at an Executive table, where all the Departments around that table have a collective view on the way forward, not only on how we deal with offenders —

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

Mr O'Dowd: — because people who have committed crimes against society or individuals need to be dealt with, but how we ensure that we reduce our prison population, given the fact that we have reduced crime.

Mr Deputy Speaker: As Question Time begins at 2.30 pm, the House will take its ease until that time. The debate will continue after Question Time, when the next Member to speak will be Tom Buchanan.

The debate stood suspended.

2.30 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Culture, Arts and Leisure

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question 1 has been withdrawn.

Tourism: Hurling

2. **Mr McKay** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether his Department has had any contact with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and the Northern Ireland Tourist Board in relation to the promotion of hurling and hurling matches as part of the wider tourism package for the North Antrim area. (AQO 269/11)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr McCausland): Responsibility for the development of a wider tourism package for the north Antrim area is a matter, in the first instance, for the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, the Northern Ireland Tourist Board and the relevant district councils. Responsibility for the promotion of hurling and hurling matches as part of that package rests with the governing body of Gaelic games, the Gaelic Athletic Association. I can confirm that none of those bodies has contacted my Department on that matter. However, the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure consulted DETI on the development of its recently published Sport Matters strategy. That strategy recognises the potential contribution that sport can make to tourism and the local economy, and it contains a number of targets and actions that are designed to promote Northern Ireland to tourists as a world-class venue for a range of sports and sports events.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answer. The GAA in Ulster commands a membership of over 250,000, has over 100,000 active players and is a key economic driver. Sports that are played in other countries, such as baseball, basketball, Australian Rules and pelota, which is played in parts of Spain, are marketed at tourists, so I believe that DETI has responsibility for promoting hurling here. Does the Minister agree that hurling is a unique and indigenous

sport and that we should be signposting tourists to it and, in particular, games such as the recent Loughgiel v Cushendall match? That would help to generate revenue for not only that part of the sports industry but the wider economy.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: We have a very wide range of sports in Northern Ireland. I am sure that we would agree that all those sports have a role to play in our tourism product.

Mr O'Loan: I acknowledge what the Minister said about the contribution that all sports make to tourism, and, in putting the remainder of my question, I do not minimise the contribution that other sports make. Does the Minister agree that the GAA offers particular sporting, cultural and educational benefits to the community, and, recognising that, what co-operation and assistance does he feel that he can offer to the GAA?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The responsibility for the promotion of hurling lies, in the first instance, with the governing body of the sport, the GAA. However, Sport Northern Ireland is responsible for the development of sport in Northern Ireland, including the distribution of funding. I will take the example of north Antrim; Sport Northern Ireland has provided £556,293 to hurling clubs in the north Antrim area, namely Glen Rovers GAC in Armoy, St Mary's GAC in Ahoghill and Dunloy GAC.

Miss McIlveen: Although the benefits of sporting events can and should be of immense value to our tourism market, does the Minister share my grave concern that unionists are, by the constitution of the GAA and the rules therein, excluded and prohibited from membership of that sporting organisation? Will the Minister call for those unacceptable rules to be amended by that organisation as a matter of urgency to reflect the shared and better future that we should all be striving for in today's Northern Ireland?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The Member raises a very important point. There is a general commitment and recognition in society now that a shared and better future is the best way forward in Northern Ireland. In the past, I have commended the professionalism and efficiency of the GAA in how it manages its organisation and activities. I recognise the importance that many in the community attach to the GAA and the value that they place on

the sports that it runs. However, I agree with the Member that there is a difficulty, and I have raised it with the GAA and Sport NI in the past; it is not something that I raise today for the first time. As the Member made her point, I noticed that some Members on the other side of the Chamber seemed to be in a state of deep denial. However, rule 1.2 sets out the basic aim of the GAA very clearly:

"The Association is a National Organisation which has as its basic aim the strengthening of the National Identity in a 32 County Ireland through the preservation and promotion of Gaelic Games and pastimes."

In other words, it places the games as a means to an end. That also needs to be taken in the context of rule 2.1 on membership, which states:

"Membership of the Association shall be granted only by a Club, to persons who subscribe to and undertake to further the aims and objects of the Gaelic Athletic Association, as stated in the Official Guide."

That quote comes from the current rules, which I think were approved in July. In other words, it states that, to play the games, whether Gaelic football or hurling, and be a member of a club, people have to subscribe to the basic aim, among the other aims, that has the aspiration of a united Ireland. Therefore, people who are from a unionist tradition and do not subscribe to that particular political aspiration find themselves excluded from participation in those games. [Interruption.]

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The GAA needs to address that issue if it is to contribute, as it could, to a shared and better future. It would be better if some Members faced up to that with a little bit of honesty and humility rather than engaging in the practice of denial. We must look at how we can address the issue and move forward for the benefit of not just the GAA but all society in Northern Ireland. It is possible to be a Protestant and play Gaelic games. However, according to the rules, it is not possible to be a unionist and play Gaelic games.

Mr K Robinson: I listened carefully to the very long reply that the Minister has just given. To lift the discussion above the parochial, does he agree that tourism should be customer-focused? With that in mind, what mainstream international sports with large international

followings does his Department promote as the basis for sports tourism in Northern Ireland?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: In all these matters, there is a crossover between DETI and DCAL. DETI's role is to promote Northern Ireland as a tourist destination through events and other means and, to some extent, product development. DCAL's role is to develop sports. One of the benefits that flows from that is, of course, that sports are a tourist attraction. The Member spoke of sports that have an international attraction. One of the most popular sports internationally is, of course, football. This is an opportunity to wish our team well this afternoon —

Mr Kennedy: The national team.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I am glad that the Member emphasised that point; he saved me the need to do so. Our national football team is in the Faroe Islands, and we all wish them well. I am sure that everyone in the Chamber would want to wish that national football team well.

We need to develop the locations for sport. We need to get the stadium development right, an issue on which we are working. We also need to increase the professionalism of our sporting organisations, and there is work to be done on not just one but a number of organisations. If we can get those things right, it will be an area in which there is potential for growth. We will not see the heavy industries of the past in Northern Ireland again in the foreseeable future. Therefore, we need to look at areas such as the creative industries and cultural tourism as the way forward economically.

DCAL: Budget

3. **Mr Gallagher** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for his assessment of the potential job losses within his Department as a result of the anticipated budget cuts. (AQO 270/11)

6. **Rev Dr Robert Coulter** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure if he has taken any steps to protect employment through the reprioritisation of his budget. (AQO 273/11)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: With your permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, I will take questions 3 and 6 together.

As a planning exercise, DFP has asked the Department to present proposals for cumulative savings of between 4% and 5% to current budget for each year of the four-year period 2011-12 to 2014-15. That represents a first step in a process that must take account of the Treasury announcement on 20 October, which will determine the level of savings against the NICS block as a whole and a number of Executive decisions, primarily on how those savings will be allocated across Departments in Northern Ireland. Only when that point is reached will we have clarity on the implications for jobs in DCAL and its arm's-length bodies.

At this stage of the Budget 2010 process, no steps have been taken to protect employment through the reprioritisation of DCAL's budget. However, the Department recognises the direct impact that job losses would have on the economy. The Department is working through scenarios that would deliver the savings proposed by DFP in its planning exercise and will consider their effects on employment in the context of the wider economy. The challenge for my Department and its arm's-length bodies will be to try to reduce the impact of any budget cuts on jobs, by working together in a more collaborative way, sharing services and assets and generating additional income when possible.

Mr Gallagher: Does the Minister agree that a good place to begin making savings is to cut bonus payments to members of quangos that are under his Department, or does he feel that he can continue to justify the payment of bonuses of the order of £15,000 to some quango members?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The Member referred to quango members. I assume that he means members of boards, because that is what that term applies to. I am not aware of any board members who get £50,000 bonuses. Most members of boards —

Mr Gallagher: £15,000.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I am not aware of that figure in respect of a bonus. If the Member can provide me with some information on that, I will come back to him, but I am not aware of a figure of £15,000.

Rev Dr Robert Coulter: In view of the proposed cuts, does the Minister have any plans to liaise with local councils? Many of their workers will be made redundant if the cuts go through.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: My responsibility must be for the Department, for the arm's-length bodies associated with the Department and for the organisations funded through some of those arm's-length bodies. Our responsibility in that regard is sufficiently wide to take up all our attention. Therefore, I suggest that issues of employment in local authorities may be directed towards another Department.

Windsor Park Football Stadium

4. **Mr B Wilson** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on the upgrade of Windsor Park and any discussions he has had with the Irish Football Association regarding the upgrade. (AQO 271/11)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Through Sport NI, my Department appointed consultants to undertake the outline business case for stadium development. Having assessed the proposals, together with other options, it was concluded that the most economically advantageous option for regional stadium development for football is to redevelop Windsor Park stadium to increase its capacity of 13,500 to accommodate 18,000 spectators. That would involve significant refurbishment of the north and west stands and redevelopment of the east and south stands. The option would also include the provision of premium seating, big screens and improved access to the new stadium via the Boucher Road.

Throughout the process, there have been ongoing discussions with the Irish Football Association and other governing bodies regarding future stadium development. That includes a meeting that I held with all the governing bodies together at the outset of the process. Members may wish to note that, in the interim, my Department, through Sport NI, has funded safety measures at Windsor Park, so that international football can continue to be played there this autumn. I had an opportunity to see that work at first hand when I attended the 2012 European Championship qualifier match on Friday night. It was a great match, and I was delighted that Northern Ireland held its own against Italy to gain a valuable point. I am sure that we will want to take the opportunity to wish the Northern Ireland team — our national team — well again.

Mr Kennedy: It says that in the notes.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: It does not actually.

The match was played in front of 15,150 fans, with reports of some fans being unable to get tickets for the match. That demonstrates the potential market for international football in Northern Ireland, which relates to a supplementary question that was asked previously, and it shows the potential and the demonstrable need to increase the capacity of our national football stadium. Nevertheless, I am conscious of the impending outcome of the comprehensive spending review. As for any of my Department's activities, funding will be subject to the normal budgetary and approval procedures. Although I will continue to fight for funding for stadium development, it will be an Executive decision whether the required funding will be found. I do not underestimate the difficult decisions that the Executive will need to take on future funding across all areas of public expenditure.

2.45 pm

Mr B Wilson: I have been a regular spectator at Windsor Park for more than 50 years. I was at the previous match between Northern Ireland and Italy in 1958, when we beat them 2-1. I am delighted with the team's recent success.

My problem is the IFA. I am continually embarrassed by its antics. Can the Minister assure the House that no money will go towards the redevelopment of Windsor Park until there are fundamental changes in the IFA?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I have said quite a bit about the IFA in the past number of months, and I have made the position clear. I am sure that the IFA is a concern to many people. The IFA needs to regain the confidence of the wider football community, the Government and the public. It cannot be overemphasised that the IFA needs to have a full, rigorous and independent review of its structures and governance arrangements. It is only on the basis of such a review that new fit-for-purpose governance arrangements can be designed and implemented. I hope that that message is taken on board.

Mr Deputy Speaker: There is constant interference with the sound system. I ask those of you who have your phone switched on in the Chamber to switch it off immediately.

Mr Leonard: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Mr Wilson referred to the IFA's "antics". Will the Minister assure the House that, if those antics preclude the association from delivering on its stadium plan and if money is available, they will not hold back the plans of the two other codes — the GAA and rugby — to proceed with their stadium proposals?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: My Department has been working, with Executive agreement, on regional stadium development as a three-sport package. That is how it should continue. When the necessary approvals have been received and the funding allocated by the Executive, the readiness of all three sports to proceed will be assessed. By that time, I would expect the IFA to have taken the necessary steps to strengthen its governance arrangements. If that is not the case, the way forward will be reviewed and taken to the Executive for consideration. I am committed to providing all three sports with fit-for-purpose stadiums that will enable them to move with confidence into the future and to enhance and develop sports across a range of levels.

Mr Hilditch: I note the Minister's previous answers, and I thank him for those. Will funding be available to take forward the stadium options at the level proposed in the outline business case?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The consultants' examination of the various stadium options was predicated on an indicative £110 million being available to government as its contribution to the overall capital costs. That was the expenditure figure that the Executive noted on 1 June 2009 as being the funding required to progress the process on which we are currently embarked. Members will, of course, be conscious of the impending outcome of the comprehensive spending review. Funding will be subject to the normal budgetary and approval procedures, as is the case for any of the Department's activities. It will be an Executive decision whether the required funding can be found to enable the long-standing and much-debated issue of stadium provision to be resolved satisfactorily.

Mr Gardiner: I declare an interest as a former chairperson, director and shareholder of Glenavon Football Club. How does the Minister respond to the concerns among the club's supporters that his provision of £30 million

investment for Windsor Park and an annual payment of £220,000 for IFA usage make it impossible for it and other local clubs to have a level playing field when, compared with Linfield Football Club, they are being disadvantaged?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: That is primarily a matter for the IFA and Linfield Football Club to determine. Nevertheless, it is crucial to the development of a regional stadium for football in Northern Ireland. The IFA and Linfield have been in discussion about the agreement and have reached broad consensus on the way forward, although that has still to be formally submitted to my Department. It is important that a fair compromise be reached. Linfield Football Club, as owner of the ground, is entitled to a fair and reasonable return for allowing its ground to be used, but any deal has also to be fair to the wider football community.

Special Olympics Ulster

5. **Mr W Clarke** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what steps he is taking to help to address the current funding deficit of Special Olympics Ulster. (AQO 272/11)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: In September 2008 my predecessor, Gregory Campbell, and ministerial colleagues from the Department of Education, the Department of Health and the Department for Social Development were invited by the junior Ministers at the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to attend a presentation by Special Olympics Ireland on the Special Olympics Ulster operational plan for 2008-2011. After the presentation, it was unanimously agreed that further consideration would be given to supporting Special Olympics Ulster's proposals and to which Department of those that will benefit from its activities should take the lead.

The Ministers and junior Ministers involved agreed that DCAL would assume the lead role for the commissioning and development of a business case on behalf of all the Departments. The business case would examine the case for the funding of Special Olympics Ulster and how it contributed to the objectives of each Department. That business case has been completed and assessed by my Department's economists as meeting the technical requirements of appraisal. However, approval of the business case requires the question of affordability to be dealt with. The sum of

government funding identified in the business case as being required to fund Special Olympics Ulster in the counties of Northern Ireland over four years is significant. Consideration will also have to be given to how funding will be utilised and whether it is entirely necessary in the context of the organisation's activities and other sources of funding.

I have forwarded the business case to relevant ministerial colleagues suggesting that, together with DCAL, the Departments make equal contribution towards the cost of funding Special Olympics Ulster over four years. The affordability of the business case can be fully assessed only when all ministerial colleagues have responded.

Mr W Clarke: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Given the work that Special Olympics Ulster does — it is recognised throughout the Chamber — is there not an onus on the Minister, as Minister of the lead Department, to call a cross-departmental meeting of all the other Ministers?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

As I said, I have written to all the Ministers asking them to set out their position and put it on record so that we know where we stand. I am awaiting some replies; I have not got all of them back yet. It is important that we get them back, as we will know where we stand with each Department and will be in a position to move forward. I hope that that will elicit responses from all Ministers very soon.

Mr P Ramsey: I welcome the Minister's statement. In recognising the contribution that Special Olympics Ulster makes to Northern Ireland, is the Minister disappointed by the Health Minister's reluctance to come on board in supporting this project? Could he outline what meetings he has had with other colleagues? Has he written to the Health Minister expressing concern at his refusal to fund the project?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

The position is this: when the Ministers and junior Ministers agreed to examine the funding request from Special Olympics Ulster, they were generally supportive in principle of the establishment of a central fund that the Department could draw on to support Special Olympics Ulster. Following my letter to the relevant Ministers and junior Ministers, which was sent on 31 August, I have so far received responses from the Minister for Social Development and the Minister of Education.

The Minister for Social Development has agreed to provide funding this year and has agreed in principle to provide funding for the subsequent three years, depending on the outcome of the current Budget process. The Minister of Education has agreed that her Department is ready to play its role in contributing to Special Olympics Ulster in conjunction with other Departments. I await responses from the Health Minister and the junior Ministers of the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister.

Mr Bresland: To date, how has Special Olympics Ulster managed financially? Is its request for funding purely a replacement for current funds?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Historically, Special Olympics Ulster has been funded through Special Olympics Ireland fund-raising activities and through moneys received from the Irish Sports Council. The business case shows that the total funding received by Special Olympics Ulster to cover the nine counties of Ulster in 2009-2010 was £996,000. That is approximately £4 million over a four-year period. The business case states that funding from the Irish Sports Council is susceptible to public sector budgetary cuts in the Republic of Ireland and the level of income required through fund-raising can no longer be maintained. Without the historical levels of fund-raising and the allocated funding from the Irish Sports Council, Special Olympics Ulster will not be financially sustainable.

The recommended option in the business case is that the Northern Ireland Government provide Special Olympics Ulster with a secure funding stream to allow it to take forward its programme of activities for a four-year period. That would involve providing £2.66 million of government funding over that period to supplement a projected fund-raising income of £1.36 million. That would be a total of £4 million over four years for the six counties of Northern Ireland. That apparent rise in funding levels will need to be further discussed with Special Olympics Ulster.

Mr McCarthy: Does the Minister agree that it would be an absolute disaster if, for the sake of a very small amount of money and the determination of some Departments, Special Olympics Ulster was not able to provide for the disabled athletes of Northern Ireland? I am glad to hear that DSD has put its hand in its pocket, but other Departments need to act similarly so that Special Olympics Ulster can maintain its

good work and provide those athletes with an opportunity to go to the Olympics in the future.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Thank you for your brevity, Mr McCarthy.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Kieran McCarthy must be a very wealthy man if £2.66 million is a small amount of money for him. I agree with the Member that it would be disappointing if some people did not honour their obligations in that regard. All the relevant Departments need to take that forward together.

2012 Paralympic Games

7. **Mr Savage** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what steps he has taken to build a pool of talent for the 2012 London Paralympics. (AQO 274/11)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Responsibility for building a pool of sporting talent in Northern Ireland in preparation for the 2012 London Paralympic Games rests, in the first instance, with the governing bodies of the sports eligible to compete in the games. I have, however, recently published a new 10-year sports strategy for Northern Ireland entitled 'Sport Matters: The Northern Ireland Strategy for Sport and Physical Recreation, 2009-2019'. Sport Matters contains targets that are designed to support the identification and development of a Northern Ireland pool of talented athletes for the 2012 London Paralympic Games and future games.

As part of the delivery of Sport Matters, Sport Northern Ireland, which is responsible for the development of sport, including the distribution of funding, recently opened a new athlete investment programme. That programme, which was previously called the athlete support programme, is designed to assist sports governing bodies in supporting their most talented athletes. Such athletes can include those hoping to compete at the 2012 London Paralympic Games. In addition, Sport Northern Ireland, with the support and assistance of partners and stakeholders, has helped to establish a network of strategically located and specialised support services and facilities throughout Northern Ireland. Such services and facilities include the Sports Institute for Northern Ireland at the University of Ulster at Jordanstown and three local performer development centres in Belfast, Lisburn and

Cookstown. All are capable of supporting talented athletes who are eligible to take part in the Olympic and Paralympic competitions.

Mr Savage: I thank the Minister for his detailed answer. There are 20 Paralympic sports. In how many of those will Northern Ireland compete? What size does the Minister estimate the Northern Ireland contingent will be at the 2012 Olympics?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

Over the past two years, we have had, I think, 13 Paralympic athletes who would be eligible to compete in the London 2012 Paralympic Games. They have received support from Sport NI. Five of those athletes compete in swimming, one in rowing, three in gymnastics, two in basketball and two in athletics.

3.00 pm

Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Older People: Residential and Domiciliary Care

1. **Mr Bresland** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the effectiveness of the provision of residential care and domiciliary care for the elderly. (AQO 283/11)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Mr McGimpsey): With the fastest growing elderly population in the UK, residential care, domiciliary care and nursing home care for the elderly are pivotal health and social care services. I have increased my investment in those key services by £58 million overall in the current CSR period, and in the 'Survey of Home Care Service Users Northern Ireland 2009', which was published in August 2010, almost nine out of 10 respondents rated the service that they received as being either good or very good. It should also be noted, however, that the latest indications are that trusts are now experiencing difficulty in maintaining services within budget. That underlines the importance of maintaining levels of funding for health and social care to meet the ongoing needs of an increasingly elderly population.

Mr Bresland: Does the Minister agree with me and with Age Northern Ireland that we need a review of how care is paid for and delivered?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:

Care is delivered and paid for through the health and social care budget. We are paying substantial amounts of money for domiciliary care, nursing home care and residential care as part of our elderly care budget, which, after hospital services, is the second largest area of spend. Members will also be aware that I launched regional access criteria for domiciliary care in 2008 to formalise the process of assessing care and care needs. That is the way in which we have gone forward. The will of the House is required to provide adequate funds for the need. That is an area of huge concern for me.

Mrs M Bradley: Does the Minister agree with me that 17 weeks is too long a time for a patient to have to remain in hospital because no domiciliary care arrangements have been put in place? I do not believe that that represents a good saving for hospitals. The patient's doctor in the hospital said that he was not fit to go home until he received a care package, yet that package could not be provided for 17 weeks. Does the Minister agree that a review of domiciliary care is needed?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:

I certainly agree that 17 weeks is far too long. I am not aware of the particular case to which the Member refers, but if she would care to write to me, I will get an answer for her as quickly as possible.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Does the Minister believe that the Commissioner for Older People will play a key role in ensuring that some of the scandalous treatment, particularly neglect, that takes place in a minority of care homes is tackled effectively and reduced significantly? Perhaps he will outline how he foresees his Department relating to the Commissioner for Older People.

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:

I am not au fait with the specific cases about which the Member is talking. I have an organisation called the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA), which carries out inspections throughout the entire system. Of course, in situations in which we have vulnerable adults, particularly the frail and the elderly, it is important that they receive the appropriate standard of care, and that that care is provided with dignity and respect. I take the issue very seriously. As a result, a series of

unannounced inspections takes place, and we look to monitor the entire estate as best we can. Members will be aware that nursing homes are provided by private concerns and not directly by the health and social care system, but we do play an active role in policing the entire constituency.

Mr McCallister: Does the Minister share my view that the Public Health Agency has a vital role to play in promoting better health right throughout life, particularly in our elderly population, and that that could be vital in improving health and in helping people in their latter years to live independently for as long as possible?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Mr McCallister will be aware that I set up the Public Health Agency specifically to address health inequalities and the effects of a person's postcode on determining life expectancy. The agency is also responsible for other areas.

The elderly are the largest growing section of our population. It is the fastest growing population in the UK. It is a fact that the elderly require more support from the Health Service than any other section of the population. If one looks for a benchmark of how well the Health Service is working, one sees that life expectancy in Northern Ireland is extending all the time, and thank God for it. However, that means that we have an increasingly elderly population that requires support, and that support has a revenue consequence. Investment is required to provide that support. I do not believe that any of us would want to walk away from that. I increased the budget in that area to deal with the demographic increase over the past three years. However, the current prospect of the future that I am looking at is a dire one.

DHSSPS: Budget

2. **Mr B Wilson** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how the increase in the health budget over the last three years compares with that in England. (AQO 284/11)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Looking at my revenue budget, I see that, over the past three years, my Department got less than 1% above inflation per annum, compared with 3.4% in England. That is equivalent

to £640 million over the CSR period or £300 million per annum. According to Treasury public expenditure statistical analyses (PESA) data, the English capital budget grew by 43% over three years to 2009-2010, while growth in Northern Ireland was only 12%. Scotland and Wales grew by 36%. Those figures should not surprise anyone in the Assembly: despite my best effort, that was what was voted for.

If historic underfunding is not tackled now, the gap between what is available here and in the rest of the UK can only widen, leaving Northern Ireland with a second-rate service. No Health Minister could accept that, and I have argued and will continue to argue for additional funding from the Executive.

Mr B Wilson: I thank the Minister for his response. The response highlights a concern that I initially raised in my speech on the Budget. Will the Minister agree that that previous underfunding supports the case for ring-fencing the Department's budget for the next year?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I completely agree with Mr Wilson. We have historic underfunding. We also have cost pressures looking forward. Let us remember that the CSR period is for four years and project where we will be four years from now, particularly with our growing elderly population. The population is also growing due to our high birth rate. So, demand is rising all the time, and it is not a demand that we can walk away from.

We have a social contract with the people here to provide health and social care free at the point of delivery, and we have to have the support to do that. Activity is dependent on the revenue provided to fund it. Without that funding, that activity will fall, because we have a monopoly on health provision as far as the state is concerned. There is nowhere else to go, and that means pain and distress for our population, and a worse situation.

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The Minister referred to the historic underfunding in the Health Service, which we all accept. He also referred to the current pressure on the health budget. However, will he not agree that his Department's continuing to pay large consultants' bonuses is putting further pressure on the health budget?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: First, we do not pay consultant bonuses. I assume that the Member is referring to the Clinical Excellence Awards. That is a UK-wide scheme to which we contribute, and that is an historic situation. The three devolved Administrations wished to review the scheme some time ago, but the Health Secretary in London did not want to go forward with that. Since the change of Government, we have agreement to review the scheme.

That is about supporting clinical excellence and innovative approaches to healthcare. As far as the underlying situation is concerned, there is simply not enough money in the health budget to fund the Health Service that we require. The gap between us and England is about £600 million and will continue to grow. A projection of the situation in four years' time shows a considerable deficit, and we will be unable to fund health and social care to the standard that our population requires. It is not just me who says so. The medical profession, nursing profession, unions, clinicians, GPs and doctors will all tell you exactly the same thing.

Mr Gardiner: Will the Minister reflect on the levels of need in Northern Ireland compared with those in England and Wales? How will our approach to the comprehensive spending review impact on that situation?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Historically, health has been underfunded. The Appleby review, which was carried out some five years ago, found that our need for healthcare was 10% greater than that in England and that our need for social services was 35% greater. The review recommended that we take a number of steps. The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety took all the recommended steps, a number of which were to increase efficiency. The review also recommended that an increase of 4.3% in revenue in real terms per annum was necessary to close the gap. That recommendation was directed to the Department of Finance and Personnel, but it was not taken forward.

This year, in real terms, the increase in the funding of the Department, which funds the Health Service, is 0.01%. Given that the demand for hospital services rose by 12% last year and by 9% the year before, everyone can see the stress.

Mr O'Loan: The Minister, in that answer and frequently in the past, has commented on the greater level of need here. Over the past three and a half years, what progress has been made on reducing that need? Can he cite any objective measures that provide evidence of improvement?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Let me give an example: we have a 25% pro rata smaller spend on mental health than in England, but a 25% greater need. From my implementation of the Bamford review's recommendations, the Member will be aware of the emphasis that I place on mental health and learning disability. That is how we sought to satisfy need. However, the fact is that we need much more revenue and investment, not only to deal with the historical underfunding but to be able to tread water and keep ourselves on a level playing field.

I also set up the Public Health Agency. It takes a hard look at health inequalities and presses down on the issues that create them. Not least among those issues is the incidence of alcohol, tobacco and drug addiction. The Member will be aware of other strategies that I put in place, such as the New Strategic Direction for Drugs and Alcohol 2006-2011 and the Addressing Young People's Drinking in Northern Ireland action plan. Those are measures that I have taken on some issues; there are others.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question 3 has been withdrawn.

Carrickfergus: Health Facilities

4. **Mr Hilditch** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he can confirm that negotiations are ongoing between the various agencies on the provision of improved health facilities in Carrickfergus. (AQO 286/11)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: As part of the business case process, a number of discussions have taken place between the Department, the trust and various agencies. As the Member is aware, my Department faces huge financial pressures on its capital and revenue budgets. When the position becomes clearer, I will have to look closely at my entire capital budget, before deciding which projects will be delivered and the time frame for completing those schemes. Such

projects include the development of any new health and care facilities in Carrickfergus,

Mr Hilditch: I declare an interest as a councillor and chairman of Carrickfergus Borough Council estates management committee. There is a fear locally that things have gone quiet. However, the Minister is aware of the enthusiasm and desire of local government to participate as landowners and potential partners in any future scheme. Will the Minister ensure that the lines of communication are improved and maintained to the highest level during future negotiations?

The Minister of Health, Social Services

and Public Safety: I am happy to give that assurance to Mr Hilditch. I am aware of his interest, and he of mine, in the project because of the partnership element with local government in taking forward primary care. A health and care centre is one of the important tools for making progress in primary care. I am happy to keep the Member up to date.

It was my intention to go forward with that project, as it was with others. However, everything is now on hold pending the capital allocation that we receive, and we have heard different reports about major cuts to the capital allocation. Members will also be aware that the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety did comparatively badly on capital for the first three years of the investment strategy for Northern Ireland but gained somewhat in the following three years. I am looking closely at that to ensure that DHSSPS makes gains, but we have to await the outcome of the CSR.

3.15 pm

Suicide

5. **Mr Adams** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of any significant difference in the rates of suicide across constituencies over the last three years and whether he is going to ring-fence funding for suicide prevention and awareness in the 2011-12 financial year. (AQO 287/11)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and

Public Safety: Over the past three years, the rate of suicide in the constituencies of North Belfast and West Belfast has been 64% higher than the Northern Ireland average. Social disadvantage is linked to a higher risk of suicide, and those constituencies contain some

of the most deprived wards in Northern Ireland. Addressing social disadvantage requires co-ordinated action by all Departments that have a role in tackling health inequalities. Although the health and social care budget for the new CSR period 2011-15 has not been finalised, I intend to ring-fence funding for suicide prevention for 2011-12.

Mr Adams: Go raibh maith agat, a Leas Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for that very clear answer. Is he aware of reports that up to a dozen young people have taken their own lives in the past months, including in recent days? Does he know that there are 30,000 citizens in the Colin area, 52% of whom are under 18, and only one family support worker is available for one day a week? Does he agree that that is totally inadequate to deal with a crisis? Will he commit to rectifying that?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and

Public Safety: I am well aware of Mr Adams' points about the challenge that we all face in dealing with the issue. Members will be aware that my Department has a Protect Life strategy and fund. One key area that we fund is the community and voluntary sector and the work that it does on the ground. I will look at the Colin Glen area to see what facilities are available through the community and voluntary sector.

A number of measures are in place, not least Lifeline, and I have made several points on the issue before, including the need for all-Ireland action. I have said on many occasions that if there were a better way to proceed, or a cleverer or more promising innovation to take forward, I would be happy to do so. The board that implements the Protect Life strategy, which addresses these issues in particular areas, is thoroughly representative of the constituency, but I share the Member's concerns.

Mr I McCrea: I thank the Minister for his answers and the commitment that he has shown to the matter. The Níamh Louise Foundation is based in my constituency. It works closely with children and people who have attempted suicide, and with those families that have had to suffer the outcomes of losing a family member who has committed suicide. Does the Minister agree that an important role can be played in our education system where organisations such as the Níamh Louise Foundation and others can go into schools and speak openly with pupils? Will he commit

to raising the matter with the Minister of Education?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Minister of Education is a member of the inter-departmental group that works on suicide prevention. Therefore, my Department and the Department of Education have routine conversations on the issue. I agree that education has an important role to play. I believe that the Minister of Education understands and accepts that, and seeks to take that issue forward. However, I am happy to raise the issue again through the Department, particularly through our Protect Life strategy.

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Minister for his replies on this important issue. Will he comment on the number of people who have accessed the Lifeline suicide helpline since its creation in 2008?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Lifeline is 24/7. We took the view that one of the most important issues for people who are in pain or distress and at risk of suicide or self-harm is to be able to talk to somebody. To date, there have been over 200,000 calls, so there has been a huge response to Lifeline and its availability at nights and weekends, and particularly over holiday periods, which is when people are liable to feel most down. The ability to refer individual callers to services is also important, and several thousand referrals have been made through Lifeline. It has been a valuable resource and has helped the situation enormously, but it is clear that we all have much more to do in that regard.

Mr Dallat: The Minister referred to the all-Ireland dimension to mental health. Does he agree that there are significant financial and other benefits to such an approach?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My emphasis is on what the Member referred to as “other benefits”, which is about being able to support people who are at risk of suicide or self-harm. That is particularly apparent among our young people, as is evidenced by the sorts of incidents to which Mr Adams referred and the close correlation between disadvantage and this tragedy.

Through our all-island action plan, we agreed a number of measures, such as the deliberate self-harm registry pilots and all-island action on

information and media and Internet monitoring. There are a number of issues on which working together is good for the population on both sides of the border. That is the key issue. For me, it has never been simply about money; it has always been about how we help those people, particularly those young people, who see no other way out.

Domiciliary Care

6. Ms M Anderson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many patients in each health and social care trust area are currently still in hospital, after their expected discharge dates, because suitable domiciliary care packages are not available. (AQO 288/11)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: As at 31 August 2010, 11 patients across Northern Ireland remained in hospital after their discharge date because of the absence of a suitable domiciliary care package. That figure is made up of three patients in the Belfast Trust, four patients in the Northern Trust and three patients in the Western Trust. The remaining patient cannot be made identifiable because of confidentiality reasons.

Ms M Anderson: I thank the Minister for that answer. My family benefits from a domiciliary care package, so we absolutely appreciate the packages that have been put in place. I would contest the figures that have just been given to the Chamber. In the Western Trust area, my office in the city of Derry is inundated with families who cannot get their family members out of hospital because they cannot get a care package put in place. When the Minister talks about budgets and the pressure on them, does he not think that it is a waste of public resources having patients being kept in hospital unnecessarily instead of putting domiciliary care packages in place?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I am happy to look into that issue in the Western Trust area because Mrs Bradley and Ms Anderson’s remarks concern me.

The target for complex discharges is 90% within 48 hours. We sit at 87%. I accept the fact that some folks have fallen through the net. I will look hard to see how we can address that. I have provided a budget for care packages for domiciliary care, nursing home care, residential

care and other types of care, but we are seriously challenged in some areas to find the funds to provide for the need that is apparent to us. That is one of the issues. The trusts must manage within their budgets, and they have to prioritise those who are at greatest risk. Those are two of the criteria that they need to address.

As I said to Mrs Bradley, I am happy to look at the issue of specific patients for the Member.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I ask Members which part of “switch off your mobile phones” is causing confusion, because the interference in the audio system is constant. Members, please switch off your mobile phones.

Mr Bell: Minister, in respect of the Ulster Hospital in my constituency, is it just a perception that a lack of available domiciliary care packages is causing bed blocking? Are you satisfied that domiciliary care providers are responding adequately to stop bed blocking and to prevent other issues arising, including hospital-acquired infections?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I have the breakdown of expenditure, which has risen, and I have the breakdown of the numbers of people in the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust area who receive domiciliary care, and those numbers have also risen.

The key question is, of course, one of addressing need and demand. Those issues must be prioritised and managed within budget. The Member will be aware that my Department's budget faced a major cut as a result of a recent Budget that went through the House. We also had a cut as a result of swine flu — I asked for £42 million and got £5 million. We then had a further cut this year of £16 million as a result of swine flu, and that was followed by a further cut of £113 million as a result of the emergency Budget. All those cuts have to be managed in-house. If I have to, I can plan for the future, but finding emergency moneys quickly is very difficult. Nevertheless, the figures show that more people are in receipt of domiciliary care in the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust area than was the case last year. The numbers have gone up marginally, and the money has also gone up. The same applies to other areas of care.

Mr K Robinson: The Minister is well aware that Members find this a very complex matter of

great concern. Will he confirm that the average number of domiciliary care contract hours provided to each client each week in Northern Ireland has crept up?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: As I said in my answer to Mr Bresland, we set in place the regional access criteria for domiciliary care in 2008. That was the framework to get a more consistent approach to eligibility, and it is the framework within which we work. For example, although not all patient discharges are complex, for complex discharges, I have set a target of 90% within 48 hours. At 87%, we are marginally below target. On that level, trusts are just about managing to get through on the moneys available. I fear for the future, and I understand that there are individuals who do not get the package that they believe they are entitled to. That is an issue, but it is a matter for trusts to administer according to the criteria laid down.

Dentistry

7. Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an outline of progress on a new contract for dentists. (AQO 289/11)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Negotiations are at an advanced stage, and we plan to pilot the new dental contract. The Health and Social Care Board is required to consult before running pilot contracts, and that consultation has now commenced. Pilots will be run in three areas — oral surgery, orthodontics and general dental services — and they will commence after the consultation exercise has been completed and evaluated.

Mr P Ramsey: I thank the Minister for the detail and clarity on the time frame. Will he confirm that he has a financial package in place to cover that contract completely?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: First, this is a new, stand-alone contract for Northern Ireland. The contract's priority remains, as it was when I awarded a tender to Oasis Dental Care, to make NHS dentistry accessible to the whole population. Those are the stated objectives. We are moving forward on that, and we will run pilots. We must prove the contract through those three pilot areas.

The Member will be aware that the dental contract in England got into serious difficulties. We want to see a contract that will work. I believe that this offers us a very good way forward — a new contract on the principle of a global sum basis, with reasonable commissioning through the board. That is the way forward.

As far as the moneys required being available in the future is concerned, I will bid for what I believe are the amounts required to deal with demand. It is a matter for the Executive and the House to decide whether they wish to follow.

3.30 pm

Assembly Commission

Stormont Demesne

1. **Mr Kennedy** asked the Assembly Commission which areas of the Stormont demesne are controlled by the Commission and if there are any ongoing discussions to extend these areas. (AQO 297/11)

Mr Neeson: The Assembly Commission controls only the area around Parliament Buildings, which is delineated by steel railings to the front and a chain-link fence to the rear and sides of the building. All the land beyond that boundary is owned and controlled by the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP).

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to Mr Neeson for his answer on behalf of the Assembly Commission. Does the Commission accept that a range of issues, including additional car parking and accommodation, are dependent on the Assembly's owning a greater proportion of the demesne? Could the template for transferring land that operated for former Army bases be utilised?

Mr Neeson: With respect to the Member's latter point, the subject is much more complex than Mr Kennedy suggests. I will be coming to the car parking issue later on; there are two questions relating to that. Consideration has been given to approaching DFP with a view to taking over the lower east car park and including it within the Assembly's boundaries. Those negotiations are ongoing. I shall deal with the whole car parking issue shortly.

Parliament Buildings: Energy Use

2. **Mr B Wilson** asked the Assembly Commission what measures it has introduced to reduce energy use in each of the last three years and how effective these measures have been. (AQO 298/11)

Mr Neeson: In 2009, a detailed review of energy consumption over the past four years, covering 2006-07, 2007-08, 2008-09 and 2009-2010, was undertaken in order to establish the total energy consumption, energy costs and CO₂ emissions of Parliament Buildings. The data was then used to help to identify measures to reduce energy consumption, such as increasing awareness of energy conservation among staff and Members, the replacement of inefficient equipment and fittings, and the completion of specialised energy surveys to identify further opportunities to reduce energy consumption.

Since the introduction of energy conservation measures, namely the energy awareness campaign in 2009-2010, total energy consumption decreased by 3.5%, energy costs by 31% and CO₂ emissions by 4% compared to 2008-09 baseline levels. The reductions in energy costs are predominantly due to reductions in wholesale energy prices. The installation of an effective monitoring and targeting system to reduce unnecessary consumption, the replacement of inefficient equipment, and structured, formal staff awareness campaigns are expected to reduce energy consumption by a further 5% to 10% over the next three years.

Mr B Wilson: I thank Mr Neeson for his response. In 2008, we discussed the possibility of achieving carbon neutrality in the Assembly, and, during the debate, a target to make the Stormont estate carbon neutral by 2015 was referred to. Are we going to reach that target?

Mr Neeson: I thank Mr Wilson for his question. I agree that it is important that we meet major targets on carbon emissions.

However, I remind the Member that the Stormont estate is largely controlled by the Department of Finance and Personnel. The Assembly Commission recognises its responsibility to reduce carbon emissions in Parliament Buildings as far as is possible and will continue to improve as time progresses.

Parliament Buildings: Car Parking

3. **Mr O'Loan** asked the Assembly Commission what action it is taking to improve car parking facilities at Parliament Buildings. (AQO 299/11)

9. **Mr Gardiner** asked the Assembly Commission when action will be taken to improve car parking facilities at Parliament Buildings for Members and staff, particularly on sitting days. (AQO 305/11)

Mr Neeson: With your permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, I will answer questions 3 and 9 together.

Car parking at Parliament Buildings is a major issue that continually raises its head. The Assembly Commission fully acknowledges the problems and difficulties that people experience with parking, particularly on sitting days. All car parks on the Stormont estate except the upper east and upper west car parks are owned and managed by DFP. Although access to the upper car parks at Parliament Buildings is restricted to Assembly use only, the Assembly does not have exclusive use of the lower east car park, and, therefore, cannot develop that car park or impose any conditions or restrictions on parking in it.

In recognition of the ongoing pressures, the Assembly secretariat has already engaged with DFP to establish whether any other measures can be taken to help resolve the problem. Negotiations are well under way, and DFP has been requested to update the Assembly as soon as possible.

Mr O'Loan: I thank Mr Neeson for his answer. There is considerable pressure on staff and visitors, as he is aware. Given the location of Parliament Buildings, that pressure will continue for some foreseeable time, and, therefore, I welcome what the Assembly Commission is attempting to do. Does he agree that pursuing enhanced car parking arrangements and improved public transport are not incompatible, and that those aims must be pursued in tandem, to use another form of transport?
[Laughter.]

Mr Neeson: Clearly, car parking is a big issue. However, there is also the question of public transport to consider, as well as the need to encourage people, including Members, to use public transport. We can also, like Conall McDevitt, encourage people to get on their bike.

It is a big issue, and the secretariat will continue to negotiate with DFP on it. A number of options are being examined at the moment, such as how the lower east car park might be improved. The big problem arises on sitting days, and the fact that the lower east car park is used widely by Northern Ireland Civil Service staff has an impact on the problem.

Mr Gardiner: I thank the commissioner for answering my question along with Mr O'Loan's. How many additional car parks are being planned for the area?

Mr Neeson: The upper car parks currently provide 119 spaces, four of which are reserved for persons with disabilities. The lower east car park provides parking for some 312 cars. At present, there are no plans to develop or expand those car parks, as to do so could be problematic and would require statutory approval, as well as significant works and finance. However, there are other options. We believe that an extra 35 or 40 spaces could be provided in the lower east car park, and we are in negotiations with the Department of Finance and Personnel about that.

We are looking at the possibility of creating car parking on the roadways below Parliament Buildings. That is part of our negotiations with DFP at the moment, and there could be security implications. However, it is a major issue and one that is continually raised at meetings of the Commission. As I said, negotiations are ongoing between the secretariat and DFP.

Mr McFarland: Car parking is but one of the continuing reductions in Members' privileges that have taken place since the Assembly was established. How many Assembly staff and party staff have parking rights on the Parliament Buildings level?

Mr Neeson: I cannot give Mr McFarland an exact number. However, the car parking provision immediately adjacent to the Building is reserved for senior members of staff, staff who have medical problems, and, as I said, there are four car parking spaces for those who have disabilities. I will find out the exact numbers and write to him.

Mr McHugh: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I follow in the vein of the Member beside me by asking about the use of the car parks. Has the Commission looked at who exactly uses the car parks? Is there a possibility

that many of those who live within a reasonable distance of here, including MLAs, could at least share cars to and from work? It would be easy to deface the pristine landscape of the site by creating further car parks either at the lower or the upper end just to accommodate more vehicles. Therefore, people should look at the options that I mentioned rather than go for the bulldozers again.

Mr Neeson: I agree, largely, with Mr McHugh. One issue is that there is no car sharing at all among Members. It is important to decide whether to develop car sharing among Members and for staff. However, we are looking at that issue continually. We realise that there is a problem and we are trying to deal with it. However, there are sufficient car parking spaces for all elected Members in the east and west car parks. We will consider the other issues of car parking. There are, clearly, options, and we are trying to sort out the issue with DFP. We will, hopefully, be able to make further progress sooner rather than later.

Assembly: European Institutions

4. **Mr K Robinson** asked the Assembly Commission for an update on the Assembly's strategy for engaging with the European institutions. (AQO 300/11)

Mr Weir: In January 2010, the Assembly approved the report of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister on its inquiry into consideration of European issues. That report contained 17 recommendations, six of which fell within the direct remit of the Assembly Commission to implement. In particular, part of recommendation 3 of the Committee's report requires the Assembly Commission to develop a European engagement strategy to enhance its engagement with the European institutions in a way that supplements and is complementary to the Northern Ireland Executive's own strategy on Europe. Having visited Brussels on a fact-finding mission in June 2010 in conjunction with the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, the Assembly Commission, following consultation with a range of stakeholders, expects to consider a draft of the Assembly's proposed strategy for engagement with the European institutions in November 2010.

3.45 pm

Mr K Robinson: I thank Mr Weir for his response on behalf of the Commission. Mr Weir, like me, is one of the original Members, so he will know that the original Assembly took a great interest in European matters. There appears to be an opinion in the House that perhaps that interest has slipped, now that the Assembly is into its third mandate. Have there been any examples of good practice in European parliamentary institutions that have formed part of our planning and development processes here?

Mr Weir: We are always in a degree of learning experience. As the Member indicated, he and I are drawn from the first Assembly, when we had the advantage of the European Union funding virtually every Member to go across to Europe. I am not sure that, either through the Assembly or, indeed, through Europe, something of that nature would be plausible again. It is important that, where possible, the Assembly learns best practice on its engagement.

In particular, we are trying to draw not only from the European Union but from a range of stakeholders to try to inform the best way forward. When people see the report in November, they will see that we have cast the net widely in the number of bodies with which we have consulted. We have been in contact with the MEPs, people such as Jane Morrice, officials in the Office of the Northern Ireland Executive in Brussels and a range of other institutions and bodies. We have consulted with just about everyone except for, perhaps, Gamu from 'The X Factor', although we may yet include her. If there are examples of best practice and, indeed, lessons to be learned, the Assembly Commission and the Assembly as a whole should be open-minded enough to take those good examples on board and always strive to use the best of international practice.

Ms M Anderson: Go raibh mile maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. When looking at areas of best practice, has the Assembly Commission considered talking to people such as Laura Leonard from Belfast City Council's European unit? I am a member of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, and we spoke to a number of stakeholders and were very impressed with the work of Belfast City Council's dedicated EU unit. She is another person whom one should go to in order to avail oneself of the kind of

information and opportunities from which Belfast City Council has been able to draw down in the region of £12.5 million because of its having that dedicated unit.

Mr Weir: I am not aware of whether we have spoken directly to Laura Leonard. I am aware that, from the perspective of Belfast City Council, and local government through the Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA), constructive work has been done through the Committee of the Regions. Therefore, lessons are to be learned. The Commission has consulted with a wide range of stakeholders, and that list is not exhaustive. As members of the Commission, we are not closing our minds to any information, and the Member's suggestion is helpful. We are open to suggestions from any Member so that we can get the best route forward.

We will have to bear in mind the lines of demarcation between what the Assembly does and what the Executive's strategy does. We should be striving for a sense of complementarity and additionality so that the Assembly, particularly in these tough financial times, does not duplicate what the Executive are doing and that both sides of the equation are implementing best practice.

Assembly: Equality and Good Relations

5. **Mr McKay** asked the Assembly Commission what action it is taking to promote equality of opportunity and good relations in its work and to ensure that the Assembly is a welcoming place for all communities. (AQO 301/11)

Mr P Ramsey: I thank the Member for North Antrim for the question. The Assembly Commission is designated as a public authority under section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, and its equality scheme was approved by the Northern Ireland Equality Commission on 27 February 2008. Under the same legislation, the Commission also has a statutory duty to have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious beliefs and political opinions and between racial groups.

The Assembly Commission continues to progress the equality agenda through all areas of business and, in the next few weeks, will submit an annual progress report to the Equality Commission for the period 2009-2010. That report will detail the progress that has been

achieved against each of the targets that are set out in our equality scheme and disability action plan, and it also identifies the proposed initiatives that are planned for the coming year to ensure that we improve the outcomes of equality of opportunity and good relations for individuals from the nine categories that are covered under section 75.

I am sure that the Member appreciates that I do not have the time today to go through that plan in detail. However, once it is approved, I will be happy to furnish Mr McKay with a copy. I will, however, draw some of the more salient points to his attention.

One important aspect in this area of work is the continued implementation of the engagement strategy. I am sure that the House will agree that those measures have been extremely helpful in enhancing awareness of the Assembly and in creating opportunities for engagement with the wider public. As well as making Parliament Buildings welcoming, we must, more importantly, make it accessible to everyone, and the Commission approved a range of physical changes throughout the Building to facilitate that.

As regards the specific issue of good relations, the Assembly Commission is committed to promoting good relations between persons of different religious beliefs, political opinion and racial groups and to challenging sectarianism and racism. We approved a good relations action plan on 21 January 2010, and that plan contributes to the corporate objective of promoting good relations, which is stated in the revised 2009 version of 'The Northern Ireland Assembly Secretariat Corporate Plan 2008/2011'. A good relations consultation document was prepared and made available for distribution to the public on Monday 29 March 2010. In total, 10 consultation responses were received by the Commission Support and Compliance Unit. The Commission is currently considering the results of those consultation exercises.

We are also in the process of conducting an internal good relations audit among secretariat staff and propose to conduct an external good relations audit to identify the barriers or perceived barriers encountered when accessing services provided by the Assembly Commission. It is also our intention to hold a good relations conference with key stakeholders in 2011 to create opportunities for learning and to identify

any methods that minimise or remove barriers to the services provided by the Commission.

In conclusion, a great deal of work has already been undertaken, and further commitments will be met to ensure that the Assembly is a welcoming place for all who choose to walk through its doors.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Member for that extremely comprehensive answer. As regards the consultation with the wider public, thousands of people come through the doors of the Assembly every year for visits and tours; I am thinking particularly of local community groups and schoolchildren. What efforts have been made to seek their views? Have any surveys been carried out about them? Is ongoing work being done about the people who come into the Building?

Mr P Ramsey: The Member makes a good point. We are always amazed when we go out to the Great Hall and see so many schoolchildren and groups of older people using the Building. I am not precisely clear about what kind of consultation takes places with those groups. I will, however, come back to the Member with a written response about that at a later stage.

Mr McCarthy: I thought that only Ministers made long-winded speeches, but the Member has broken that rule. There was obviously a reason for that question being tabled. Is the Member or the Commission, therefore, aware of any communities not being welcomed into this place?

Mr P Ramsey: I am not aware of that happening. We have a duty of care to everyone who uses this facility, including Northern Ireland minority groups. The Commission is no different from any Department and must, therefore, strictly adhere to equality legislation. However, it is challenging work, and we try, all the time, to improve the quality of the information and the message coming from Parliament Buildings. I made this point to the Member for North Antrim: we continue to work on the engagement strategy and are trying, in a meaningful way, to ensure that everybody feels welcome and feels the warmth of Parliament Buildings when they attend.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Mr McDevitt is not in his place for question 6, and Mrs Dolores Kelly is not in her place for question 7.

Mr Cree: I am in my place. *[Laughter.]*

Parliament Buildings: Roof Refurbishment

8. **Mr Cree** asked the Assembly Commission to outline the roof refurbishments planned for Parliament Buildings. (AQO 304/11)

Mr Neeson: I did not think that we would get to question 8, but we are prepared.

There have been ongoing problems with water ingress through the flat roofs of Parliament Buildings for many years, and extensive repairs have already been carried out. A lasting solution to the problem will most likely entail the replacement of the entire roof covering or the addition of a secondary layer to cover the existing roofs. Facilities Directorate has been granted Commission approval to develop an outline scheme proposal that will address the ongoing roof problems, while also providing limited additional accommodation at fourth-floor level.

Ongoing alterations and improvements to the accommodation in Parliament Buildings following the recommendations of the strategic review of accommodation have reduced the requirement for additional accommodation, and priority will be given to resolving the ongoing water ingress problems. There is, however, an opportunity to resolve both of those ongoing problems by incorporating a limited amount of additional accommodation in the refurbishment proposals. Revised and reduced scheme proposals are due to be considered by the Commission towards the end of the year.

Mr Cree: I thank Mr Neeson for his reply. Will he flesh that out a bit more? For example, is it envisaged that the refurbishment and repairs will be flat, similar to the existing roof, and will not have a tilt? If the Commission is planning any public spaces on the roof, as opposed to office space, will he ensure that the architectural integrity of the Building is maintained?

Mr Neeson: There are plans for possible accommodation to be provided on the roof. As far as the existing proposals are concerned, it will remain a flat roof. Carrying out those repairs to the roof and constructing the additional accommodation will be somewhere in the region of £4.5 million to £6 million. However, I agree entirely with the Member that the integrity of the Building must be preserved.

I remind the Member that single-storey accommodation was provided on the roof during the 1940s, possibly in the form of what we call Portakabins. They were removed when the major refurbishment of the Building took place in the 1990s. Certainly, the Member makes a valid point about the integrity of the Building.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question 9 was grouped with question 3.

Assembly Library

10. **Mr Dallat** asked the Assembly Commission to outline the total cost of purchasing books, newspapers and magazines for the Assembly Library over the last three years and the level of borrowing in the same period. (AQO 306/11)

Mr Weir: 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 those services using the professional skills of a team of qualified librarians and researchers.

Consequently, although 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, which are utilised in responding to approximately 5,500 requests for information per annum. The total cost of purchasing books, newspapers, periodicals and magazines for the Assembly Library over the last three years is £110,297.38 per annum, as detailed in a table which will be supplied to the Member.

The use of magazines and newspapers is not recorded, as they are not for loan. Customers come into the library and refer to them without notifying staff.

Mr Dallat: Given the enormous amount of money that is spent, does Mr Weir agree that there is every reason why all Members should be well informed and well read?

Mr Weir: I agree that Members should be well informed and well read. I leave it to Members' judgement as to whether that is always the case.

4.00 pm

Executive Committee Business

Addendum to the Programme for Government

Debate resumed on motion:

That the addendum to the Programme for Government for the Department of Justice, as agreed by the Executive, be approved. — [The Minister of Justice (Mr Ford).]

Mr Buchanan: Many views have been expressed, both inside and outside the Chamber, as to the merits or otherwise of devolving policing and justice powers. However, we have now moved on, and I broadly welcome the addendum to the Programme for Government for the Department of Justice.

Earlier this year, we agreed to take responsibility for those key portfolios. I think that it is safe to say that we all agree on one thing: we have taken on an extremely challenging responsibility. That is putting it mildly. We are reaping the harvest of years of direct rule, underfunding, neglect and prevarication on a range of policing and justice issues that are long overdue for reassessment and action. I do not envy the size of the task that confronts the Minister of Justice. However, I have to say that, to date, he has done a relatively good job overall. In some ways, it pains me to say that, but it has to be said.

Already there is evidence that devolution is making a difference and that it is delivering results on the ground. However, we have just started on what will be a long and potentially difficult road, and we could obviously be pushed off track by many things, including a rise in terrorist activity by so-called dissident republicans or a shortage of crucial funding at this time of cuts. Where those areas are concerned, we must be careful that we continue to pursue these devolution issues.

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

Whatever lies ahead, I look forward to playing my part as a member of the Committee for Justice. I assure the Minister that any criticisms that I may have will be constructive, because policing and justice issues are too important for cheap political point-scoring.

Although I support the addendum and the associated goals and public service agreements, I have one or two points that I want to raise. The addendum quite rightly emphasises the importance of building public confidence in the policing and justice system. In a divided society, that will mean different things to different people, but there are common concerns and worries about the way in which our society is going. I know from regular contact with people in my constituency that many feel vulnerable in their own homes. That applies especially to those who live in remote rural areas, those who are elderly and those who live on their own. They do not feel safe from burglaries or criminal activity, and that feeling will only increase as the winter nights come upon us. Sadly, those people do not have any real confidence that the police will be able to protect them in their own homes or that they will be successful in pursuing those criminals.

The level of antisocial behaviour in towns and villages across my constituency is also on the increase. Shared public spaces are often out of bounds to law-abiding people who are fearful for their safety. The addendum states:

"Although, in general, most crime-types have reduced significantly, not everyone feels safe."

I find it hard to believe that there has been a general reduction in crime, and to say that not everyone feels safe in their own home is something of an understatement. If confidence is to be secured, we really need to see urgent and radical improvements. Policing must be effective, and justice must be done and be seen to be done. We can bring all the proposals that we wish through the House today and on other occasions, but if justice is not done, our words will be in vain. At the end of the day, actions speak louder than words, and it is actions that the people on the ground really want to see.

Perhaps I am missing something or have misunderstood the data, but it seems that some of the targets in the PSA section of the addendum are quite conservative and unchallenging. They will not give a great amount of confidence to the general public. For example, one of the targets is to increase public confidence in the effectiveness of criminal justice from a baseline of 35.6% to 37.8% by March next year. Given that that is just 2.2% of an improvement, I do not think that that will build much confidence in the community.

Another PSA target is to increase victim and witness satisfaction of the criminal justice system —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Mr Buchanan: The target is to increase satisfaction from 65.3% to 69.5% by March 2011.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Your time is up.

Mr Buchanan: Again, that is not a very dramatic increase over the next six months. That is something that we will have to continue to —

Mr Deputy Speaker: I call Mr Jonathan Bell.

Mr Bell: The addendum to the Programme for Government raises a number of questions; I will comment on four specifically. I value what the Secretary of State said about tackling terrorism at last night's launch of the book 'Policing the Narrow Ground'. He made a commitment to stand by Northern Ireland and said that the Government of the United Kingdom will "bear down" on any group that is prepared to overthrow a democracy or attempt to overthrow a democracy.

To the credit of our Police Service, more arrests and charges have been made already. Let me make it very clear: no one wishes to see arrests and charges. However, the small minority who are organising themselves have an agenda of death and destruction. Death and destruction is all that they can offer to society. They attempt to inflict death and destruction on a democratic society that has chosen life and a different way forward in the hope that it will engender some fear and some support for their agenda; that support cannot be got. The priority to tackle terrorism must be as strong now as it has ever been.

Mr McCarthy: The Member commended our local Police Service for the work that it has done. Will he join me in congratulating the authorities across the border, where Mr Ford's equivalent, Dermot Ahern, was able to scoop up a number of these people yesterday? We should be very grateful for that.

Mr Bell: My colleague the Member for Strangford makes a valuable point. Over the weekend, I commended publicly the finding of weapons, bomb component parts and ammunition in Wexford. At the last Policing Board meeting, too, I commended the Deputy Chief Constable's

excellent co-operative work with the Garda Síochána. Whether it is the terrorists of al-Qaeda, the terrorists of the Real IRA, the dissident IRA blowing up children in Lurgan or the murder of Bobby Moffett on the streets of Belfast, all forms of terrorism are wrong and need to be tackled with an international dimension. All police forces should co-operate.

My point is one that the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom made in his first conference speech. He said that he will pursue those responsible by all the means that are at the disposal of the United Kingdom Government. In the past two years, our police force has seized drugs with a street value of £23 million. Last year, it seized drugs with a street value of £10 million. The reason for the reduction is that it had smashed some of the organised crime gangs that produce cannabis internationally.

The Minister mentions fear of crime in his document. I bring to the House's attention again the concerns of many people in Comber and Donaghadee that their local police stations are to close. We have raised those concerns directly with the police personnel concerned. I am especially concerned about Comber, where the police presence could be whittled down to only five neighbourhood officers working out of a station. Having whittled the force down, the next move is to ask what good having a building is. A Comber population of 9,000 plus clearly want a local police station. It helps them to combat the fear of crime, and it is something that they are due. We need to think very carefully before we close those stations.

We welcome wholeheartedly the strategy's inclusion of victims. We need to listen clearly to what victims are telling us.

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

Mr Bell: Few people will realise the truth that was brought home to the Policing Board's human rights and professional standards committee when it met in Londonderry on Friday. It found out that the police are called out every 21 minutes of every day in Northern Ireland to deal with incidents of domestic violence or abuse. The policing of those incidents costs £180 million. Although I appreciate the expertise that the police have shown through the work of their domestic violence liaison officers and their outreach programmes, it is important that we factor in the effect of that.

In conclusion, we have to ensure that there is speedy and direct access to justice, particularly in the area of youth offending.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the opportunity to comment on the Department of Justice's addendum to the Programme for Government. In my remarks, I will concentrate on the aspects of the programme that relate specifically to policing.

I welcome the commitment given in the addendum to provide adequate funding for policing. No one believes any longer that there can be a blank cheque for the resourcing of policing, as there was in the past. The Policing Board and the Police Service of Northern Ireland realise that. The board is seeking to ensure that the resources that the police have at their disposal are being used in the most effective and efficient way possible and that improvement is part of the culture of the Police Service.

The SDLP agreed with the ring-fencing of funding for policing and justice for one year after devolution, that is, until April 2011. In light of the current threat, we support the protection of the budget line for front line police officers. At the weekend, the police, for whatever reason, were unable to respond to a very serious incident in my constituency in which a woman was tied up, held at gunpoint in her home and robbed. That lady and her family contacted the police, but the police were not in a position to come to her home. In fact, in the end, she had to go to a prearranged location somewhere between her home and the police station to give a statement to a detective.

If those are the types of pressures that front line policing is facing at the moment, we can ill afford to reduce the resources available in that budget line. That does not mean that there are not opportunities to be more efficient, especially in back-office services in the PSNI; for example, in human resources, the finance department and the press and public relations department. Perhaps those areas can be examined in greater detail. However, we are strongly opposed to any reduction in numbers of front line Police Service members.

We agree with the Chief Constable's policy of moving police officers from desk jobs to community and neighbourhood policing. I believe that around 400 officers have already been moved from desk jobs to front line policing. We

very much welcome that; it is a trend that we would like to see continuing.

4.15 pm

I will now speak about local partnerships on policing and community safety. The SDLP is anxious about any reconfiguration of the Patten arrangements. The arrangements have been one of the anchors of political development and the peace process here. Even when the Assembly was suspended and not all political parties were on board with policing, the Patten arrangements stood us in good stead. They are an extremely important part of the entire policing project and an aspect of policing in which the public have great faith. The arrangements have stability and accountability. It would be neither helpful nor healthy to tinker with them in any way.

If the role of the Policing Board or that of the DPPs was diminished —

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

Mr D Bradley: — there would be a danger that those who wish to exploit —

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

Mr D Bradley: There would be a danger that those who wish to exploit those particular changes — the people who advocate violence — would take solace from that.

Lord Browne: I welcome the addendum to the Programme for Government. As a recent addition to the Committee for Justice, I have learnt quickly the valuable contribution that devolution of justice powers has brought to Northern Ireland. The addendum sets out a wide agenda for change that should allow the Assembly to make the justice system more responsive to people's needs. It addresses areas that are of most concern to people in their daily lives, particularly antisocial behaviour. Public confidence in the system is also a theme throughout the addendum.

It does not, however, shy away from addressing larger issues, such as reform of the courts and the Prison Services and improving how organised crime is fought. I am pleased to see that a clear process has been laid out for achieving those goals, because, far too often, those kinds of proposals for reform are sprawling, undirected and open-ended. In this case, the addendum lays down a plan and a

clear timetable and, indeed, has targets for the areas that it addresses. I am hopeful that, in this case, even though I am aware that there are concerns with some of the targets that have been set, those targets and programmes will be followed through on in coming months.

Although many issues in the justice system are, by their nature, best addressed nationally, the addendum does a good job of identifying those in which a local approach can ensure a better outcome for people in Northern Ireland. I, therefore, support the motion.

Ms Lo: I support the motion. It is good to see the devolution of justice powers working. Now, the Assembly can take local action to address local issues. I commend the Minister for producing his proposed addendum to the Programme for Government.

I welcome his focus on building community confidence in the fairness and effectiveness of the criminal justice system. It is fair to say that public confidence in the system has been low. In particular, owing to their perception that the police do not always respond in time to their calls for help, many people in ethnic minority communities tend not to report crime. The low rate of prosecutions for racist crimes does not give them much faith in the system. I hope that the proposed measures will help to build confidence in all sections of the community.

I welcome the addendum's goal to establish an interdepartmental approach to reduce offending and to bring an offender-management strategic framework to the Committee for Justice by January 2011. In fact, the crime rate here is much lower than that in many other parts of the world. For a place to enjoy a low crime rate, it needs an inclusive, fair and stable society. To achieve that society, we need a holistic approach involving other Departments.

We have 45,000 young people — about 19% of our 18- to 24-year-olds — who are not in education, employment or training. They are bored and have limited income and are, therefore, at higher risk of getting involved in criminal activity, such as antisocial behaviour or so-called recreational rioting. The Department of Justice should be working with other Departments, such as the Department of Education and the Department for Employment and Learning, to help young people to become employable and to make them feel that they have a positive contribution to make for society.

Westminster is proposing sweeping welfare reforms. Disadvantaged people already on the margins are going to be pushed even further. When people feel that they have nothing to lose, it is so easy for them to step over the line into crime. The Department for Social Development and the Department of Justice need to be considering support in deprived communities to prevent people falling prey to criminality.

Many people in prisons have low literacy and numeracy skills, mental health problems or personality disorders. I welcome the management framework, particularly for providing opportunities for rehabilitation and for addressing education and skills development and recommendations from the Bamford review.

I am encouraged by the Minister's commitment to ensure a new strategy to improve community safety and to reduce antisocial behaviour and, thus, the fear of crime. In particular, I welcome the strategy's support for the PSNI in respect of neighbourhood policing. With the large number of students coming back into south Belfast in September, we have seen an increased number of burglaries in recent weeks. It is important that students are given guidance and support in protecting their properties, and residents would be very pleased to see more police on the ground dealing with community safety issues. However, the action plan from the Holylands stakeholder forum has urged for more police powers to issue on-the-spot fixed penalty notices regarding alcohol abuse and antisocial behaviour, as well as powers to seize alcohol and to designate an alcohol disorder zone in the Holylands. Perhaps the Minister will consider those actions in future, under the community safety strand of the addendum.

Mr McFarland: I welcome the justice addendum to the Programme for Government. Having served for five years on bodies such as the Policing Board, the Committee on the Preparation for Government and the Assembly and Executive Review Committee, I know that we have been at this for a very long time. It is gratifying today to have a local Justice Minister bringing forward a programme that reflects local justice concerns. I have, however, a comment or two and some queries.

I welcome the plan to improve the treatment of victims. There is anecdotal evidence that some of our police officers need improved training. We have some evidence from Bangor where,

at night-time particularly, it has become clear that some officers are attending incidents but their training in dealing with victims of rape and violence is, perhaps, not at the level that it should be. There is a need to refresh the training of officers who deal with such incidents and to improve their skills.

I note the intention to deal with antisocial behaviour, which I am quite sure is a concern in every constituency and for all Members here. I hope that the addendum will allow the police to reclaim the streets. There should be an emphasis on getting back the streets, and that requires proactive activity. I am encouraged in some areas where the police have taken steps to identify who is causing the trouble and to divert them. When I was on the Policing Board, we saw an example of the mobile video cameras that the police use. They are mounted in about two minutes and can sit around a corner, monitoring and capturing evidence to put people into court. I hope that that sort of proactive idea will be part of the Minister's plans.

I welcome the co-ordination of the Departments. I hope that that means that we will not have situations such as those in Bangor and, I am sure, lots of other areas, in which the Planning Service agrees to the building of estates in areas that do not have a single amenity for young people that is within walking distance. The result is that those young people end up in the town centre with nothing to do and causing trouble. Hopefully, we will see ideas in which the Department for Regional Development, the Department of the Environment and the Planning Service get together with the Department of Justice to plan our towns and villages better.

The plan to merge district policing partnerships and community safety partnerships has been on the go since I got involved in justice. This is an opportunity to sort out the confusion and to revisit the theory of the district policing partnerships, for example. They were supposed to be stand-alone entities under their own managers. In many cases, they have ended up as a council subcommittee. That is a problem. Community safety partnerships were the child of the Northern Ireland Office and were used as a method to channel funds to paramilitaries. There was a time when it might have been a good idea to encourage paramilitaries into the justice system through restorative justice. However, I think that as things have matured somewhat, the time has come to re-examine

that area and produce a single body that is fit for purpose and does what both those organisations were intended to do.

I am encouraged by the plans for neighbourhood policing. I have a worry, however, because, again, there is anecdotal evidence from a number of constituencies that, due to shortages, the PSNI command is moving neighbourhood officers into normal policing. It would be an awful pity to lose that ability, where local police officers contact local people. I worry that, in the great demand and reality of day-to-day policing, we are, perhaps, in danger of losing some of those.

The Assets Recovery Agency was very effective here with regard to organised crime. Local people saw it; it was very successful. The result was that it was subsumed into the Organised Crime Task Force. Will the Minister tell us whether the Organised Crime Task Force has been as successful in dealing with assets and criminals as the Assets Recovery Agency, and whether that is, perhaps, the way ahead?

Finally, I have concerns over the resourcing of the criminal justice system. First, I would like confirmation from the Minister as to what is likely to happen with the police college. Secondly, I have concerns, and colleagues who have been on Committees with me will be bored to death by them, that —

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

Mr McFarland: — we end up with 22 MLAs involved in policing.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Your time is up.

Mr McFarland: Surely that will not be sustainable if the number of Members is reduced.

Mr B McCrea: I declare an interest as a member of the Policing Board of Northern Ireland. When I look at the statistics for policing in Northern Ireland, I am minded that we have half the rate of crime per capita than other parts of the United Kingdom, and the statistics are on a downward trend. One might, therefore, wonder why people are fearful of crime and are demanding more resources. It is one of the issues that I hope the Minister will address. We need to find a way of explaining to people that justice depends not only on the policing system, but on the whole of the criminal justice system. Speedier justice is required.

The Policing Board had the privilege of talking to Keir Starmer. He has managed to bring in some remarkable changes in England and Wales. I hope that the Minister of Justice will take on board some of the initiatives that Mr Starmer has introduced, because that is the issue. The public are not satisfied. They hear about bad things going on in their neighbourhoods, or, even worse, bad things happen to them, but it seems to take a long time for people to be brought to justice or to be convicted.

Building an economy that will sustain us all was at the heart of the Programme for Government, and it is the overarching aim of the Executive and the Assembly. However it is impossible to do that unless we get peace and stability.

That is the cornerstone of everything else that we need to do, so we must put the appropriate investment into those areas.

4.30 pm

There is an issue for all of us here, as politicians who occasionally find ourselves on ‘The Stephen Nolan Show’ and elsewhere. We need to understand that we have to win a battle for hearts and minds and to explain to all the people of Northern Ireland that policing is working for them and that it is fair, impartial and is actually doing the job. I stress to the Minister the need not just to do a good job but to explain to people what is being done so that they have confidence in the forces of law and order.

I will outline some of the areas about which members of the Policing Board have a little bit of concern. There seems to be some discussion about the effectiveness of the PPS. It is not for me to say whether it is effective or not, only that it seems something of an interface area. I know that Minister Goggins tried to bring together all elements of the criminal justice system, which seemed something of a challenge. I hope that the Minister will be able to make his best efforts to make sure that all the agencies involved in the criminal justice system work together for the betterment of all.

I am mindful of some of the issues within the Policing Board’s remit that do not appear to work as well as they might. It is important that we refocus our activities to make sure not just that the Policing Board takes responsibility for holding the PSNI to account, which it is bound to do under statute, but that it plays its role in

convincing the people of Northern Ireland that the police are effective.

I have recently heard some discussion about the DPPs. To my mind, they are an invaluable tool in reaching out to the community, but they are effective to a greater or lesser extent depending on the geographical area involved. It is really important that the link between the DPPs and the Policing Board is maintained and strengthened. I should also add that the Policing Board has a valuable role to play alongside other agencies, particularly when considering prisons, Opportunity Youth and reoffending rates. In all of those issues, the views of people who have experience of policing and a political background could be taken into account.

I will finish by saying — this was mentioned by Jonathan Bell, who is no longer here; sorry, he is; he has just moved position — that domestic violence is a particularly important issue that accounts for almost half our murders. We need virtual courts and specialist courts that understand the issues associated with rape and other matters. The Minister of Justice might address those issues, and he might also deal with the way in which we look after the 15- to 17-year-olds in our society who currently have nowhere to go. Moving them on is just not sufficient.

The Minister of Justice (Mr Ford): I thank colleagues who contributed to the debate, particularly those who chose to make positive comments. Agreeing the addendum is a very important milestone in the concept of the devolution of justice powers. I could probably do with about an hour to respond to all the points that were raised, especially by some who spoke towards the end, who managed to get in a number of substantive points. I will do my best in the few minutes that I have.

The launch of a consultation document on sentencing guidelines is just one example that shows the practical, realistic progress that is being made in implementing the addendum. It is not a matter of a debate today; it is a matter of recognition of the work that is going on. The addendum is informed by a wide range of views and comments in the Assembly and beyond, and I am grateful for all of those. The Department will be fully engaged in the development of the next Executive Programme for Government, and justice priorities will be fully integrated into that.

In my introductory remarks, I said that progress had been made already on a number of the

key goals outlined in the addendum. However, as highlighted by Lord Morrow, it is still an ambitious programme of activity, and a lot is expected to be achieved in the lifetime of this Assembly. I know that, with the support of the Executive, the Justice Committee and Members of the Assembly generally, those targets are achievable, although they are demanding.

To turn briefly to Members' comments, I hope that I can reflect how the debate went. It was fortunate that the first two Members to speak, Lord Morrow and Raymond McCartney, were the Chairperson and the Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Justice. Although neither is in the Chamber at the moment, I want to place on record the Committee's assistance, formal and informal, in working on the addendum and on the Bill that I propose to introduce next week. That was an example of how Committees should operate. I welcome its support and its challenges equally. I particularly welcome the comments made about the Justice Bill. The Committee has already spent a great deal of time on it, and that time will no doubt increase over the next few weeks. I look forward to working on the Bill with Lord Morrow and his colleagues.

It was acknowledged that we have a challenging agenda for the remainder of the Programme for Government period. At the same time, some Members, starting with Lord Morrow, suggested that there were not challenging targets. I accept that there are issues, because the targets are to some extent derived from an existing position. We have to recognise that on issues such as community confidence we start from a low base, and, to use the old analogy, Rome was not built in a day. However, I am committed to setting stretching objectives for the system, and we will engage with the Committee to that end as we contribute to the next Programme for Government.

I was going to twit Raymond McCartney for not being in the Chamber for the first part of my contribution, but it is not everybody who can get the Chief Whip to apologise on their behalf, so I will leave that out. He, too, made extremely positive comments about the work of the Department and the Committee to ensure that change happens for the benefit of all the people of Northern Ireland. He highlighted the prisons review as one of our most important targets, and I welcome his comments about the professionalism and objectivity of Anne

Owers and her team. In all areas, however, the challenge is to deliver, not just to strategise, and we will continue to work on those reforms as the review team proceeds with its work.

Tom Elliott rightly highlighted the importance of how we approach and support victims. That point was made by other Members, including, notably, Jonathan Bell. I hope shortly to launch a consultation on a code of practice to victims, which addresses the requirement in the Hillsborough agreement and highlights the personal commitment that I have from my own professional background.

Tackling delay, which was highlighted by a number of Members, is also one of my key priorities. A major new programme of work was put in place over the past few months. At one of my first meetings after taking office I met the Criminal Justice Board about speeding up justice. That issue will certainly not be forgotten by the Department. It is vital that justice not only be done but be seen to be done on a reasonable timescale. The recent Criminal Justice Inspection report highlighted useful recommendations on the delay issue. Again, we need to underpin those recommendations with specific targets. However, the targets that I inherited on devolution are simply not fit for purpose, and we are developing fresh objectives that will reflect the totality of victims' experiences.

When talking about victims, Mr Elliott highlighted the victims of domestic violence, as did other Members. I will continue to work with Michael McGimpsey to address and reduce domestic violence. Mr Elliott and others can be assured that the Department of Justice will not let that matter slip down the agenda, even though some priority lies with the Department of Health.

With regard to dealing with dissidents, I assure Alban Maginness that it is critical not just to me but to the Chief Constable and the Policing Board to ensure that the good work of personal policing is not undermined by paramilitary and terrorist activity. Policing with the community remains the fundamental principle on which all policing in this society has to be based. I am determined to do all that I can to ensure that the police have the necessary resources to deal with the threat posed by terrorists. However, it is not simply a policing problem: we all share the responsibility on that.

Alban also highlighted North/South co-operation. The addendum does not try to list all my engagements with Dermot Ahern and the agencies across the border, although my latest meeting with him was just last week. That followed a tripartite meeting the previous week with him and Kenny MacAskill, the Scottish Justice Minister. Members can rest assured that I recognise the need for cross-jurisdictional co-operation, not merely cross-border co-operation.

Stephen Farry, as I would have expected, highlighted the importance of working towards a shared future and the role of the Justice Department and its agencies in that. Many of the actions highlighted in the addendum reflect that commitment, particularly on community safety strategy, young people at risk and tackling hate crime. As Stephen Farry recognised, they are not issues for the Department of Justice to tackle on its own. My Department is, however, committed to playing its part in working collaboratively with all other Departments.

Paul Givan highlighted the challenges of working towards increased public confidence in the criminal justice system, and that point was made by other Members as well. A key part of his contribution was his reference to prisons, and he stressed the need to reduce reoffending. The review team, led by Dame Anne Owers, will inform and provide the impetus for further developments in that regard. That is just part of a wider focus on reducing reoffending. It tackles some of the root causes of offending through early intervention and is one of the key goals in the addendum. However, I must say to Mr Givan that people are sent to prison as punishment not for punishment. The duty of prisons is to rehabilitate people when they are there as their punishment. We make society safer by ensuring that they do not reoffend when they come out.

Mr Poots: I thank the Minister for giving way and for raising that valid point. Does he agree that prisons have insufficient reform measures, such as training and preparing prisoners for returning to society? Does he agree that a drugs culture should not be tolerated in prison? Those who enter prison without a drugs habit leave with one; that is unacceptable.

The Minister of Justice: I agree with the Member about the need to provide the maximum possible opportunities for rehabilitation. We ensure that all prison staff engage in that process. That is why I was

delighted last week to provide 17 certificates for work on restorative justice to Prison Service staff, ranging from headquarters to basic grade prison officers, and to hear about the work put into practical application as a part of rehabilitation.

Carál Ní Chuilín commented on the integration of community safety partnerships and district policing partnerships, which I welcome. Integration will have real benefits. Other Members expressed concerns; however, we are doing this in a way that will ensure that the role of DPPs as outlined in the Patten proposals and highlighted by Dominic Bradley, in particular, will continue to be a part of the review.

The addendum commits us to reviewing the power of the Prisoner Ombudsman in the light of experience elsewhere. I wrote to the First Minister and the deputy First Minister seeking their views on whether a wider examination of ombudsman services might affect that work so that I can make an informed decision on the way forward for the Prisoner Ombudsman.

Jimmy Spratt highlighted resource issues and made reference to bringing more officers to the front line, a point made by other Members. The Department must do all it can to support the Chief Constable's operational proposals for that, but I must underline my commitment to the tripartite governance arrangements. It is not for me to interfere with the operational decisions of the Chief Constable.

I welcome the comments of Danny Kennedy in support of work on organised crime, and I reassure him and Alan McFarland that that remains a priority for the Department. The addendum to the PSA includes targets on using the proceeds of crime and raising public awareness of the harm caused by organised crime. That would bring to attention human trafficking, an issue that has been well aired in the Chamber in recent weeks. I welcome also his positive comments on the review of prison governance.

I have to make it clear, particularly to Conall McDevitt, that Dame Anne Owers and her team are engaged in a fundamental review. They can make wide-ranging recommendations about the future shape and operation of the Prison Service. When making a simple comparison with the Patten reforms of policing, we must bear it in mind that there is no open-ended budget to carry through the reforms needed in the Prison Service. Nonetheless, the team has been

asked to produce fundamental proposals, not simply to tinker around. We have to recognise the financial environment, but we must also recognise the need for reform.

In answer to the question that I was asked — I cannot now remember by whom — on the two recent prisoner releases made in error, I can confirm that a comprehensive inquiry is under way. As I told the House, I will report to the Assembly when that inquiry is completed.

4.45pm

Mr Givan: Will the Minister give way?

The Minister of Justice: Yes, briefly.

Mr Givan: Without prejudging the outcome of the fundamental review of the Prison Service that is taking place, can the Minister guarantee that he would reject any recommendation from that review that might propose 50:50 recruitment in the Prison Service?

The Minister of Justice: Having commissioned a review, I would be foolish to say whether I would agree with everything that it says or would disagree or take any position in between. All the recommendations will be examined in detail.

Conall McDevitt mentioned Brian Faulkner's all-Ireland intelligence service. Without going any further on that point, I can assure him that I see the highest-ever levels of co-operation between the PSNI and An Garda Síochána in every meeting that I have. I believe that that is meeting the needs of the people of Ireland, North and South.

Mr McDevitt: Will the Minister give way?

The Minister of Justice: I am sorry; I really am out of time.

Conall McDevitt and John O'Dowd talked about the review of youth justice that will soon be under way. That will be an opportunity to take account of the concerns expressed about custody for young people. I reiterate a point I made earlier: the Department of Justice will work with other Departments as we deal with a variety of issues concerning disaffected young people.

Tom Buchanan also talked about public confidence, but I believe that that issue has many factors. It is about the accessibility and visibility of the police; the responsiveness of policing; and the outcomes of the criminal justice process and the speed of that process.

There are many things that cannot be delivered in a few simple steps, but that work, which needs to be addressed in the long term, underpins much of what we seek to do.

Tom Buchanan and Basil McCrea highlighted the perception that crime is not decreasing. Crime is decreasing in this society. The reality is that our region has had historically low records of crime in comparison with other regions in these islands, and the trend is downwards. However, there is a real issue of perception, and each of us has a role to play in addressing that, particularly Members who are involved in DPPs or CSPs.

Jonathan Bell referred to the threat of terrorism that we are under. I will update him on the statistics as at the end of last week: 17 people were charged with serious terrorist offences in the whole of last year, yet 62 people have been charged so far this year. That is significantly higher than the increase of approximately 50% in the number of acts of terrorism. It is an indication of the good work being done by the PSNI and by An Garda Síochána.

Mr Bell mentioned police stations and made a point about confidence. Surely, confidence is something for the Chief Constable to address in the way in which he deploys his officers on the ground. That point was made by others. I assure Members of our commitment to working in partnership to ensure that we make the best possible arrangements to provide for the future policing and justice system of this community. Much of the debate has been about policing.

I have a final word on resourcing. We are in the middle of a very difficult spending round, and there are real problems in finding the resources necessary for the justice system. However, I have been making strong representations to the Government — frequently with the Secretary of State and with the Deputy Prime Minister — on the issue of adequate resources for front line policing, which relates to both anti-terrorism and community policing. Six months ago to the day, this Chamber elected me Minister of Justice. I am delighted to commend this addendum to the programme to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the addendum to the Programme for Government for the Department of Justice, as agreed by the Executive, be approved.

Private Members' Business

Local Government (Disqualification) (Amendment) Bill: Consideration Stage

Mr Deputy Speaker: I call Ms Dawn Purvis to move the Consideration Stage of the Local Government (Disqualification) (Amendment) Bill.

Moved. — [Ms Purvis.]

Mr Deputy Speaker: Seven amendments have been selected for debate. Members will have a copy of the Marshalled List of amendments, which provides details of the amendments. The amendments will be debated together in a single group relating to the nature of the disqualification and whether Members of the Assembly will be disqualified from council on taking their seats in the Assembly or after a period of 60 days.

I remind Members who intend to speak that they should address their comments only to the amendments in the group. The Questions on stand part will be taken at the appropriate points in the Bill. If that is clear, we shall proceed.

Clause 1 (Disqualification)

Mr Deputy Speaker: We now come to the single group of amendments for debate.

Ms Purvis: I beg to move amendment No 1: Leave out clause 1 and insert

"Disqualification

1. A person shall be disqualified for being a councillor if that person is a member of the Northern Ireland Assembly."

The following amendments stood on the Marshalled List:

No 2: In page 1, line 5, at end insert

"(2) The disqualification in subsection (1) shall take effect at the end of 60 days after a person takes his or her seat as a member of the Assembly."
— *[The Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment (Mr Boylan).]*

No 3: Leave out clause 2 and insert

"Commencement

2. Section 1 comes into operation on the day of the first local general election to take place after Royal Assent." — *[Ms Purvis.]*

No 4: After clause 2, insert the following new clause:

"Interpretation

2A. In this Act—

'Councillor' and 'Local government' have the same meaning as in the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 1972;

'Local general election' has the same meaning as in the Electoral Law Act (Northern Ireland) 1962."
— [Ms Purvis.]

No 5: In clause 3, page 1, line 11, leave out "(Amendment)". — [Ms Purvis.]

No 6: In the long title, leave out

"Amend the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 1972 to". — [Ms Purvis.]

No 7: In the long title, leave out "being elected, or being," and insert "being". — [Ms Purvis.]

Ms Purvis: I begin by thanking members and staff of the Committee for the Environment for their good work and thoughtful examination of the Bill. Committee members raised some valuable procedural and technical issues on how the legislation should be applied. The amendments that I tabled address those concerns and strengthen the Bill.

It is my understanding that this is the first private Member's Bill in the history of the Northern Ireland Assembly to reach Consideration Stage. I thank my colleagues for taking the issue of dual mandates and the quality of our democracy so seriously. Members will be aware that the purpose of the legislation is to end dual mandates in the Northern Ireland Assembly and local councils. Dual mandates occur when an individual holds more than one level of elected or co-opted public office at the same time.

At this stage, all parties in the Chamber are generally committed to ending the practice of dual mandates, although the motivations behind that policy choice are certainly varied. The sticking point seems to be over when the practice comes to an end and by what means. Some of the issues were discussed in Committee. Members raised concerns about the timing of the disqualification in the Bill; in other words, the exact point at which a local councillor who is also a Member of the Assembly is disqualified as a councillor. Indeed, during the drafting of the Bill, the provision required the

most detailed examination of existing legislation on when an individual's electoral mandate comes into effect as well as of new regulations on how vacancies on local councils are filled.

The Bill prevents Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly from being local councillors and being elected to local councils. In the case of an individual who stood for election to the Assembly and a local council and was elected to both, clause 1 would disqualify that individual immediately from the local council seat, with the assumption that the political party would fill the vacancy under the new co-option regulations. However, there was some concern among Committee members around how that would work in practice and that it was too immediate a disqualification and did not give parties sufficient time to respond, particularly if there were multiple vacancies on more than one council.

Members of the Committee were also concerned that, if the disqualification prevented an individual from being elected to a local council, that would create questions about whether that seat was held by that person's party to fill by co-option. It could also undermine the representation of a political party at a local council's first AGM after an election and, therefore, impact on the strength of the party in negotiating committee assignments; for example, chairperson and deputy chairperson positions. I agree with Committee members that that language had the potential to create a degree of confusion around the results of local council elections. Amendment No 1 would modify clause 1 to allow an individual to be elected to the Northern Ireland Assembly and a local council but not to proceed with both offices. The amendment would revise the Bill so that the disqualification is essentially triggered at the time at which a newly elected individual signs the Roll of Membership of the Northern Ireland Assembly under Standing Order 3(3). Members will recall that that must occur within eight days of an election.

Members will also be aware that, under electoral law, a newly elected councillor comes into office on the fourth day after an election. The amendment would not prevent that designation from taking place, nor would it prevent an individual being elected at the same time to the Assembly. It would disqualify an individual from the local council seat once she or he is deemed to have taken both the Assembly and

local council offices, which would be signified by signing the Assembly's Roll of Membership.

If an individual signs the Assembly Roll of Membership within the four-day time frame in which an individual is deemed to be elected to a council, that individual is still designated as elected to council but is subsequently disqualified and the seat considered vacant, to be filled by co-option. That may be the case, for example, if the Assembly and local council elections do not occur on the same day, or, if they are held on the same day, the Assembly vote count is conducted first.

If the individual signs the Assembly Roll of Membership after the four-day time frame for a local elected office, clearly, that individual is already deemed to have been elected to a local council and is now disqualified from pursuing that office further. The seat is designated vacant, to be filled by co-option. In either case, amendment No 1 modifies all language in the Bill which had the potential to interfere with an individual's designation as "elected". Disqualification occurs when an individual who has won election to both offices triggers the mechanisms by which they are legally deemed to be elected to both offices.

Those arrangements will provide a newly elected individual, along with his or her political party, with several days — anywhere from four to eight — to decide what will happen with the local council seat, assuming that that is the one that the individual does not want to pursue, and an additional five weeks, under the new co-option regulations, to determine who will fill that seat. It will also ensure that the individual is deemed to be elected to both seats and that the party continues to hold that seat through a council's AGM, although whether there is a party representative in that seat will depend on how quickly a party moves to fill it under the new co-option regulations. In the case that independents find themselves in that situation, the new co-option regulations allow them to provide the Chief Electoral Officer with a list of six potential replacements to fill the seat by co-option. That list is produced only after the election.

The arrangements created by amendment No 1 are the best way to proceed. They harmonise the Bill with existing legislation on elections and co-option, and they create a clear, concise process for dealing with dual mandates when

they occur. The arrangements remove any ambiguity about whether an individual has been elected and how a vacancy will be filled, and they should motivate political parties to move quickly to fill vacancies, so that the governing process is not held back unnecessarily.

Amendment No 1 also makes the legislation sufficiently limber to deal with any electoral arrangements. At the moment, we assume that the next local and Assembly elections will take place on the same day. There is potential for that arrangement to continue in future, but equally it may not. It would be a mistake to assume that what happens in the next elections will happen for ever, and it is not appropriate to draft legislation on the basis of one set of elections that will take place in the immediate term. Amendment No 1 will make the Bill equally adaptable in the event of multiple and stand-alone elections. It also creates a reasonable time frame for political parties and newly elected individuals to decide what will happen with vacant seats created by the dual mandate disqualification. I think that four to eight days under electoral law and an additional five weeks under co-option regulations provide an acceptable, sensible amount of time for such decisions. Extending that any further has the potential to create disruption and to delay the work of local councils and, possibly, the Assembly.

The co-option regulations now in place are also sufficiently flexible to allow the replacement process to be truncated if a party needs to move more quickly to fill a vacancy, for example before a council's AGM. A political party's nominating officer has up to 28 days to nominate someone to fill a vacancy, but that entire time need not be taken if there are compelling reasons to fill the seat more quickly.

I find it difficult to believe that any individual standing for the Assembly and a local council at the same time will not have a clear idea, in advance, which office she or he will take up, if honoured with election to both.

Given the time that political parties in the Province spend strategising and negotiating over elections, it is implausible to think that the outcome of an election will not be anticipated well in advance, with appropriate contingency plans in place. For those reasons, I am unable to support amendment No 2.

5.00 pm

As I think my remarks have illustrated, I certainly understand the reasoning behind amendment No 2, but it would make the Bill unnecessarily complicated and inflexible. We cannot assume that the arrangements for the elections that we anticipate happening next year, in which Assembly and local council ballots will be held on the same day, will continue in perpetuity. Amendment No 2 is designed to accommodate that situation. If, instead, Assembly and local council elections are held on different days or even in different years, amendment No 2 has the potential to create unnecessary delays and disruption to the work of local councils. Amendment No 2 does not appear to acknowledge that new regulations for filling vacancies on local councils provide an additional five weeks for political parties to nominate a replacement for a disqualified councillor. If the amendment were to be accepted, it could be more than three months after an election before a council would have its entire delegation of full-term councillors in place, thereby delaying or interfering with the work of local councils until it is achieved.

Amendment No 2 would also remove the flexibility that is currently on offer to political parties under the new co-option regulations. If a political party needs to move quickly to fill vacant seats before a council's AGM, the co-option regulations allow that to happen. A party has 28 days to fill a seat, but there is nothing to prevent it happening sooner. Delaying the disqualification for 60 days would also delay the co-option process. Therefore, rather than filling seats with individuals who will serve for the full term of the council, during a council's AGM, a political party could be stuck with a number of short-term seat fillers who would be far less likely to achieve chairperson or vice chairperson positions.

The additional time that amendment No 2 would create is designed largely to accommodate problems that a political party is having now, namely, in recruiting and preparing suitable candidates for public office. It is never a good idea to write legislation to accommodate the shortcomings of a political party, because doing so simply institutionalises those problems. Amendment No 1 does a much better job of clarifying when a disqualification would take place and of allowing reasonable time for political parties to deal with vacancies. I value and

appreciate the Committee's efforts to address concerns about the legislation constructively, but I cannot support amendment No 2.

I want to clarify that none of the amendments would create new restrictions on candidacy, and that is also true of the Bill, which will not prevent an individual standing for election to the Assembly and a local council at the same time if, for example, the elections are held on the same day. None of the amendments that I tabled would affect that. Some commentators on the legislation are less than pleased with that. They find the idea of an individual pursuing more than one elected office at a time to be cynical and greedy. The standard that they would like Northern Ireland politics to achieve is of one person solely dedicated to one office at a time. However, I received guidance that placing restrictions on candidacy raises issues about the right of access to public office. Therefore, the legislation will not interfere with any individual putting her or his name forward for elected office within the existing legal guidelines. It will also ensure that ending dual mandates will not interfere with what has come to be seen as the natural progression from local elected office to regional and beyond.

Amendment No 3 deals with implementation. Clause 2 states that the legislation will:

"come into operation on the day of the first district council general elections to take place after Royal Assent."

Presumably that will be in time for the elections next year. Amendment No 3 would retain that as the date for implementation. However, it would amend some of the language in clause 2 in order to harmonise it with existing legislation on elections to local government. In essence, the amendment would replace "district council general elections" with "local general election".

It remains important that the legislation is implemented as soon as possible. In the aftermath of the expenses scandal, growing public cynicism and waning voter turnout, there is no acceptable reason to delay implementation of the legislation, which is a statement of confidence in the Assembly and its ability to understand and reflect the demands of the electorate.

Amendment No 4 adds an interpretation provision as a new clause to the Bill. This clause will clarify the meaning of the

language used in the legislation and tie it to existing legislation on local government and elections. Amendment No 5 is a consequential amendment, which will be necessary if amendment No 1 is accepted, to ensure that the Bill's title is consistent with its purpose.

Members may be aware that the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 1972, which the Bill would have originally amended, contains language regarding disqualifications:

"for being elected or being a councillor".

As I already said, it was deemed necessary at Committee Stage to remove all connections in the Bill to the phrase "being elected" so that there is no ambiguity about whether a candidate is duly elected before the disqualification is triggered. Amendment No 5, therefore, removes the Bill's connection to the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 1972 and makes it a stand-alone piece of legislation.

Amendment Nos 6 and 7 are consequential amendments, which, if amendment No 1 is accepted, modify the long title of the Bill.

The political parties represented in the Chamber may think of the end of dual mandates as an opportunity to start something new. There is much potential in our country for political progress and innovation. Our starting point is not ideal; Northern Ireland has one of the worst records in Europe for women's political participation, despite all that women did in this country to hold the fabric of society together during the Troubles. I watched in amazement in recent months as all the resignations from the Assembly were filled by men, even the three seats that had previously been held by women.

Although I welcome my new male colleagues and commend the parties and party leaders for using the co-options to bring, at the very least, the average age in the Chamber down a few years, a bad situation for female political participation is getting even worse. This is not an equality rant: this speaks directly to the quality of representation and governance that we offer the people in the Province. The evidence is now overwhelming that the more a governing body represents its actual population, the better decisions it makes. Governments that more equally represent the gender make-up in particular deliver government that is more responsive to the needs of its citizens and generates better policy on issues that directly

affect quality of life, including education, health and infrastructure.

Although there are real inconveniences in the legislation for some political parties, there are also exciting opportunities. Almost 60,000 people in Northern Ireland are desperate to find work. Many of them are highly skilled individuals who would bring a great deal of experience to governance. Many are young people just starting out who would bring a fresh perspective to, and new ideas on, the way in which we run the Province. The percentage of our population with political interests and political skills must be massive. We are a highly politicised society, yet the percentage of people who are involved in politics is tiny. If voter turnout is any indication of public interest, it is dwindling. It is time to work proactively to bring new ideas and new people into politics and governance in Northern Ireland, and the ending of dual mandates is an excellent way to do that.

I listened to the Committee's concerns, and I think that the language in the amendments that I moved today addresses those concerns and strengthens and improves the Bill. I commend the Bill to the House and thank my colleagues for their thoughtful consideration of the amendments.

The Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment (Mr Boylan): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. On behalf of the Committee for the Environment, I welcome the Bill's Consideration Stage. I thank Members for their participation in the Committee Stage and look forward to this opportunity to address the problem of so-called double-jobbing.

The Bill was referred to the Committee on 8 March 2010, and although it contains only three clauses, a nine-week extension was necessarily sought. The Committee's reflections on the Bill led to two recommendations. However, before I address the amendments specifically, I want to mention some key issues that the Committee considered in relation to the Bill.

First, there were varying degrees of support for the Bill in the Committee, because, whilst members largely agreed that there is a need to end the practice or to reduce the number of MLAs who hold a dual mandate, some felt that it should be done on a voluntary basis by parties rather than be forced through legislation. However, once the policy principles of the Bill had been agreed by the Assembly at its Second

Stage — that was a unanimous agreement by the way — it was referred to the Committee for investigation. It was then the job of the Committee to scrutinise the detail of the Bill rather than to question its existence.

Secondly, everyone in the Chamber today is aware of the risk of conflicts of interest that arise in public life. The sponsor suggested to the Committee that the concentration of power, decision-making and public representation among a limited number of people with dual mandates increases that risk. Most members agreed, but some felt that that becomes a significant issue only if the MLA is a Minister.

Thirdly, at the time that the Committee scrutinised the Bill, 62% of MLAs in this House were double-jobbing. However, of that 62%, only 12% were female. We all know that the success of this Assembly rests on a wide range of opinions, and those figures suggest that representation of women is an area on which we can improve in the Assembly and, certainly, at local council level. The sponsor and women's groups suggested to the Committee that the Bill will provide the incentive and increase capacity for the much needed expansion of women's representation in the North. The Committee gave its full support to increasing the number of women in political life but, following procedural advice, declined to amend the Bill to proactively encourage the election of women.

Finally, before I move to the amendments, I will touch on an over-arching concern of us all, namely the need to improve public perception and confidence in public representatives and to eradicate any perception that many MLAs and councillors are out for personal gain. That the Bill will go a long way to delivering that was one the main thrusts of the sponsor's arguments, regardless of ability and time to do both jobs well simultaneously. She also argued that it will make the political process more open and transparent.

I will now speak on amendment No 1, which was recommended by the Committee. The Committee was keen that nobody should be barred from standing for election either as an MLA or as a councillor. However, under the terms of the Bill as drafted, an existing MLA would have to resign before being allowed to stand for election. The sponsor agreed that that was not the intention of the Bill and that everyone should be considered eligible to stand

for election. She consequently agreed to amend clause 1 so that it will prevent MLAs holding council positions but will not prevent their standing in council elections. The Committee, therefore, supports the sponsor's amendment that disqualifies a person from being a councillor if that person is a Member of the North of Ireland Assembly but does not prevent an MLA standing for election. On behalf of the Environment Committee, I support amendment No 1.

I will now mention the remaining amendments and will ask Mr Weir, when he speaks, to move the amendment on behalf of the Committee. Amendment Nos 3 and 4 were not presented to the Committee during Committee Stage. However, the sponsor advised Committee members that some technical amendments may be necessary. As the sponsor has indicated, amendment Nos 3 and 4 fall into the technical category. Amendment No 3 specifies when the legislation will come into operation, and amendment No 4 clarifies the definitions used in the Bill. On behalf of the Committee, I support amendment Nos 3 and 4.

Amendment Nos 5, 6 and 7, which relate to the short title and long title of the Bill, were presented to the Committee during Committee Stage. The Committee was advised by the sponsor that they were consequential amendments that are required as a result of her amendment to clause 1 to allow anyone to stand for both general and local authority elections.

A LeasCheann Comhairle, the Committee agreed the long title and the short title, subject to those amendments. On behalf of the Committee, I support amendment Nos 5, 6 and 7.

With your indulgence, I will say a few words on behalf of Sinn Féin as an MLA for Newry and Armagh. I support the proposals in the Bill. On the previous occasion that we talked about double-jobbing, some Members tried to convince those on this side of the House that it was not detrimental to those who represent people at local council level. Unfortunately, the Minister has left the Chamber, but the examples of John Lewis, Glenavy and the North/South interconnector show what double-jobbing in both the council and the ministerial role can lead to.

5.15 pm

Mr T Clarke: Will the Member give way?

The Chairperson of the Committee for the

Environment: I will give way in one minute. Any man or woman who is given a mandate to come here to propose draft legislation should not be able to sit at local council level and start to implement it. No one in the Chamber should be fooled into thinking that that is not a conflict of interests.

Mr T Clarke: Does the Member agree or disagree that the same should apply to Members from his party, who take parliamentary expenses but do not attend Westminster?

The Chairperson of the Committee for the

Environment: I thank the Member for his intervention, but if he were to pay closer attention to — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. I need to remind Members that we are debating a Bill. There is another time and another place to discuss those other issues.

The Chairperson of the Committee for

the Environment: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I was going to say that we should pay particular attention to the Bill and what it is trying to achieve. As I said, the Minister is unfortunately out of the Chamber. We need to get to a process of legislating here and handing powers down to the local councils. That should be open and transparent, and the councils should have a responsibility.

Mr Ross: I have no interests to declare, as I am not a member of local government. However, I am interested in the issue. The two Members who spoke most recently mentioned two issues that I must challenge. First, they said that the legislation will get more women into local politics. I would love to see the Chamber be more reflective of society in Northern Ireland, and I would love to see more women get into politics. However, I fail to see how this piece of legislation will get any more women coming into local government than come in under the ordinary selection process. Indeed, the co-options to the House have resulted in fewer women than were here previously. The practice of getting more women into politics means that more women should be responsible for coming forward for selection and that individual parties should encourage them to do so. I am opposed to any sort of positive discrimination; I think that all women should stand on merit alone. However, it is false to suggest that the

legislation will help to get more women into local politics.

The second issue that both those Members mentioned was public perception. With your indulgence, Mr Deputy Speaker, I will say that it is important to highlight how things have moved on since the previous time that the issue was debated in the House and the previous time that it was debated in the Committee, when we took evidence from the Member for East Belfast whose Bill this is. On previous occasions, there was much discussion from Members, including the Bill's sponsor, about the public outrage over the issue of dual mandates. However, on examination, it transpires that fewer than 15 members of the public responded to the consultation on the Bill. That highlights that the issue is, perhaps, not as big with the public as she and other Members have led us to believe.

In the 2010 general election, the issue did not put off members of the public electing candidates who already held other public offices. If the public had been totally outraged by the issue of dual mandates, they would not have elected candidates who held another public office, or, in the cases of one successful candidate, more than one public office.

The media-driven campaign on the issue of a couple of months ago has now almost reversed, and elements of the media are now saying that they are concerned that senior Members who are experienced politicians are leaving the House. Indeed, I saw that the 'Belfast Telegraph' had a campaign to keep my colleague Sammy Wilson in the Assembly. Therefore, we have seen public perception move full circle, because the public want to see the most talented people here at a time of economic crisis, and there has been also been a media turnaround.

Our party position on dual mandates has been clear. Perhaps we have been sceptical about the reasoning behind the legislation and the reasons why some people are pushing it. However, if Members examine the record, they will see that my party has taken more steps than most other parties to remove the practice of dual mandates. It was my party that said that it fully intended to end the practice of dual mandates. We made a commitment to stand down Members of the House who are also elected to Westminster. Since the legislation was last debated in the House at Second

Stage, we have seen the successful Member of Parliament for North Belfast, Nigel Dodds, stand down. We have also seen Jeffrey Donaldson, Ian Paisley Jnr, Jim Shannon, William McCrea and David Simpson all stand down voluntarily from the Assembly to bring about an end to the practice of dual mandates.

Let us examine the record of the other parties and the other Members of this House who have shouted loudest about the issue of dual mandates over the past year. The SDLP has three MPs, Mr Durkan, Mr McDonnell and Ms Ritchie, who are all still Members of the Assembly. Sinn Féin has made no effort to stand down its MPs from the Northern Ireland Assembly. I recognise the point made earlier that Sinn Féin Members do not take their seats, but they, therefore, should not get allowances. However, perhaps that is an issue for debate in another place. Of course, the electorate took the choice of ending dual mandates out of the Ulster Unionist Party's hands altogether.

If other parties disagree with dual mandates on a point of principle, there is absolutely nothing stopping them from ending the practice right now. In fact, co-option legislation has made it easier for them to take a principled position and stand people down from local government or the Assembly. As the proposer of the legislation mentioned at the beginning of her speech, that legislation exists so that parties can co-opt Members and keep the seats. There is, therefore, nothing stopping those parties from voluntarily moving away from dual mandates, as my party did with Members who were also Members of Parliament at Westminster.

I will now deal with a couple of the amendments. I understand the rationale behind amendment No 1. It was poorly worded in the first instance, and the wording now corrects that, more or less. Amendment No 2 came about because the Member who proposed the legislation informed the Committee for the Environment, which was looking at the Bill, that there was an issue with the way it was originally drafted. She pointed out that difficulties could arise should an Assembly election and a local government election be held on the same day. Under the original wording, if the count for the Assembly election happened first, any person who was returned as a Member of the Assembly would be barred from being returned as a local councillor. Co-option would, therefore, be virtually impossible, because

neither the individual nor his party would hold the seat.

Amendment No 2 allows for a certain period of time before the stepping down of a local councillor is required, which, therefore, makes the legislation fit for purpose. Whether that period of time is 28 days or 60 days is not the issue; rather, it is the fact that the public may have some concerns about the general principle. Therefore, although the amendment addresses the problem with the initial draft, the public will be concerned about the idea of voting for one person and getting another. I fully recognise that I may not be the best person to say this, as I was one of the first co-opted Members during this Assembly mandate. However, I am certainly not suggesting that there should be expensive by-elections when people stand down. I do not think that that is practical or fair on ratepayers. Indeed, the fact that there are multi-Member constituencies makes it very difficult to do that.

There are differences in the co-options that we have seen in the House. In my case, it was because of the tragic death of my friend and colleague George Dawson, who fully intended to serve a full term. He would have made a very good and valid contribution to the Assembly, and he is still sadly missed. Some co-options have taken place because — and I am looking at Mr Leonard and Mr McDevitt specifically — other Members have retired from active politics, and their contributions will also be noted. Other Members of my party were co-opted fairly recently because their predecessors were successfully elected to another place and, in line with party policy of phasing out dual mandates, stood down. I know that the Alliance Party did the same for Naomi Long when she stood down because she was elected to another place.

There is a difference between standing down from and being co-opted to this House and the practice of individuals standing for election knowing full well that they never intend to take their seats. The public maybe slightly concerned about the latter because it does not particularly strengthen democracy, and they will not have had the opportunity to vote for who will actually take the seat. I think that a stronger form of democracy is when individuals stand for election and are honest and open with the public by saying that they intend to take both offices.

Ms Purvis: The Member argued in favour of ending dual mandates, so why is he now arguing

that someone should stand for both elections on the same day? Surely the Member's party decides and selects candidates for election, and any party that is opposed to dual mandates will not select someone to stand in both elections.

Mr Ross: With respect to the Member, I am arguing about what the public's perception will be. The Bill allows one person to stand but someone else to take the seat. My argument is not about whether it is preferable for someone to hold two posts. I am saying that at least the person is honest with the electorate. At present, when an individual stands for office, the electorate knows that he or she is a Member of the Assembly and a member of a local council. However, if the Bill were introduced, that person could stand for two elections, but the public would not know who would end up with one of the seats. That is one issue with the legislation that will concern the public.

Amendment No 3 seeks to introduce a commencement Order that will bring the legislation into effect straight away. My view is that, in the future, there will be clear lines of distinction between those who represent Northern Ireland at a national level at Westminster, those who are Members of the Assembly and those who sit as councillors in local government. In future, there will not be the same blurring of the lines that has, for valid reasons, existed over the past number of years.

As I said, the DUP has phased out many of its MPs from the House. However, it did that in a phased manner so that all of its experienced politicians did not leave at one time and, potentially, leave a capacity gap. Such changes must be phased, and the same argument applies in local government. Of the Members of the Assembly who are involved in local government, many are its leading figures and are the most experienced people on local councils. The concern is that, if all MLAs withdrew from local councils at one time, there could be a capacity issue. My personal preference is, therefore, for a phased approach to ending dual mandates, if that is the direction in which the House wishes to go. It would better to adopt a phased approach over a period of five or six years than to do it all at the same time. I favour that approach rather than the position that is adopted in the Bill.

It is fair to say that the DUP remains fairly sceptical about the Bill. The party remains of

the view that the public are not as concerned as some Members of the House suggest. The public are the ultimate arbiters in such situations and can decide to vote us in or out of office. I look forward to the contributions of other Members and to other parties explaining why they have not voluntarily stood down their local councillors on a point of principle.

Mr Kinahan: I welcome the chance to speak on the tabled amendments. I congratulate Dawn Purvis on pursuing the Bill and keeping it on track.

Amendment No 1 and its consequential amendments change the Bill from legislation that attempts to amend the 1972 Act to stand-alone legislation. The arguments that Dawn Purvis made for that change today are understandable. The Member does not want to trigger a by-election through disqualifying people before they have been elected, nor does she want to discourage councillors from climbing the ladder by making this a resign-to-run Bill. The Ulster Unionist Party accepts those arguments, but, although it recognises that the Bill disallows a politician from holding a dual mandate in the Assembly and on a local council, the party still has some concerns. That is especially pertinent as the next Assembly and council elections look likely to be held on the same day.

Although the Bill improves the current situation, there is a danger that some parties in the Assembly will choose to run sitting Assembly Members in council seats. In light of the Secretary of State's amendments to the 1962 Act, which allowed the co-option of council seats, there is a danger that the electorate would be voting for a candidate who had no intention of taking the seat. In many respects, the public could be duped by cynical party politics. In light of the amendments that were tabled by the DUP and the Alliance Party, but not accepted by the Office of the Speaker, that fear is well founded.

In their failed amendments, the DUP and the Alliance Party made clear their view that dual mandates are acceptable. In light of the low esteem in which politicians are held at the moment and the fiscal constraints facing Northern Ireland, that is not a position that the public will find acceptable.

5.30 pm

I am hopeful that the potential embarrassment that the Bill will cause to those who would co-opt —

Mr Ross: I thank the Member for giving way. My intervention relates to an issue that I raised during my initial contribution. If the Ulster Unionist Party is saying that it is opposed to dual mandates on a point of principle, why has that party not stood down all of its MLAs who are also local councillors?

Mr Kinahan: I am slightly confused by that point, as our party is in the process of standing down from other seats in the same way as the Member's party. I find it interesting that every single DUP Member sitting there is also a councillor. *[Interruption.]* I take that back in respect of some Members.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind Members that we are discussing the Bill.

Mr Kinahan: I will start that paragraph again.

I am hopeful that the potential embarrassment that the Bill will cause to those who would co-opt will discourage sitting MLAs from seeking to run in both the Assembly and council elections or, down the ladder, so to speak. I am interested in what those two parties have to say on the issue, although we have already heard from one.

Having raised those reservations, the Ulster Unionist Party recognises that amendment No 1 and its consequential amendments are the best option available. We will vote for those today. The Ulster Unionist Party, however, is not minded to vote for amendment No 2, which was tabled by the Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment.

Mr Weir: If memory serves me right, amendment No 2 was passed by the Committee unanimously. I will be interested to hear what has changed in respect of amendment No 2 between Committee Stage and now that seems to have both the Ulster Unionist Party and the Chairperson of the Committee running away from it at breakneck speed.

Mr Kinahan: The Member was obviously not paying attention during that bit of the Committee meeting — if, indeed, he was there — because we abstained. *[Interruption.]* May I continue?

Mr Weir: If I misconstrued the Member's position, I apologise. However, why has he shifted from the Frank Maguire position of abstaining in person to suddenly finding the amendment totally unacceptable?

Mr Kinahan: Perhaps the Member was not listening accurately. We abstained because we wanted to think about it, which allows us to decide whether — *[Interruption.]* Perhaps Members will let me finish. We had to choose whether to reduce the amendment or go against it completely. I felt that we ought to discuss that choice and that there was time in which to do that. Members will hear that today and when the Bill comes back again.

There is a danger that amendment No 2 will enable a politician to draw two salaries and/or expenses for two different mandates at the same time, albeit over a 60-day period. I recognise that the purpose of the amendment was to put a definitive date on the handover. However, based on our conversations with the Assembly's Bill Office, I and my party colleagues believe that we can pinpoint the handover period to the date that a Member signs up to be an MLA and, therefore, remove a prolonged period of dual mandate and the ability to draw two salaries or expenses. That seems like the fairest approach and the one that best reflects the public's concerns.

I toyed with the idea of declaring no interest at the beginning of my speech, because I am no longer a councillor. I stood down from my council seat at the earliest opportunity, because I believe that it is wrong to be paid by government and local government and to have two mandates. As we all know, the Assembly is full time. Full time means full time in that it is Members' main work over and above their lives at home.

I have had to delegate all my other interests, and I know that many people here have done the same. Today we need to focus on dual mandates and not double-jobbing. A deliberate smokescreen has been put in place on this matter, using double-jobbing as a means of justifying holding two elected mandates. When the position of councillor was being sold to me, I was told that it was a one-or-two-days-a-month job. That was a good piece of salesmanship. To do it properly, it requires two days or more a week. As you will all know, it is a job of consultation, discussion, long meetings, party

matters, and, most importantly, constituency matters. How can you do a full-time Assembly role on top of that? As you will also know, we all have two full days of plenary sittings here and two half days of Committee work before you add in Long Gallery events, all-party meetings, individual party meetings, charity or business lobbying, and, once again, most importantly, Assembly-level constituency work.

Mr Givan: Will the Member give way?

Mr Kinahan: No is my next word here. No, you cannot do both jobs. Yes, I will give way.

Mr Givan: I am grateful to the Member for giving way. You said that this is a full-time job. From reading the Register of Members' Interests, I see that you spend some hours a week in Danny Kinahan Fine Arts and Castle Upton Gallery. Therefore, if we are talking about double-jobbing, would you not need to refer to that?

Mr Kinahan: Obviously, you were not listening, which is a habit in your party. I have delegated all my powers, but, when you delegate, every now and again, you have to re-delegate and talk things through. I am honest and straightforward. I would also like you to remember that I have been here for only a year. I have to keep things running until I win my election next year and then you will see a difference. *[Interruption.]* May I carry on, Mr Deputy Speaker?

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Members, especially the new ones, that you make your remarks through the Chair.

Mr Kinahan: How many times have we all heard from our constituents that our councillors do nothing for us? That is grossly unfair. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. I must insist that all remarks are made through the Chair. *[Interruption.]* Are you disagreeing with me?

Mr T Clarke: If you are referring to me, yes I am.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I am referring to all the Members who were speaking over there.

Mr T Clarke: You were looking straight at me.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I caution the Member not to question the Chair. Carry on.

Mr Kinahan: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. The notion that councillors do nothing for us is grossly unfair, but it may seem that way to the

public because so many MLAs were doing both jobs and spending too much time in meetings and not enough time with the public. I have pledged to spend as much time as I can with my constituents, going out to meet community groups, visiting businesses and trying as best as I can to visit every corner of my constituency. Our job is about finding out, knowing and resolving their concerns, and coming here to make the laws of the land.

Holding two mandates is hogging two sums of taxpayers' money — £43,000 here and £8,000 or more from the council. However, what also matters is that you are preventing others from becoming councillors. There is a propensity for councillors to remain in post as if it is a divine right, but today's legislation should help to change that. Every councillor should always encourage his or her replacement so that he or she can aim for higher office or should be working as a team.

The legislation was originally written on the assumption that the review of public administration would happen and that councillors' workloads would be significantly increased. The review of public administration will happen, but we do not know what format it will take.

The Bill is not just for now but for the future, so this argument is just as pertinent. No review of public administration means that we still have a little time to get our organisation right. At present, we have two problems that further illustrate a need to do away with dual mandates: there is no formal link between councils and the Assembly; and councils often work in isolation from each other rather than for Northern Ireland as a whole. Examples of that are what happened with John Lewis, the sports stadium and the energy from waste project. We need MLAs working primarily for the greater good of Northern Ireland and not solely for their council areas.

The Assembly needs to create a more formal link with local council offices and vice versa. At present, it is like a skeleton, where 26 main bones are too loosely connected without the muscles pulling them together.

Those who oppose the Bill do so purely for party political reasons. They wish to keep power rather than put country first. That is a complete and utter disgrace. The Ulster Unionist Party supports the Bill and the amendments, except for amendment No 2. We urge all those who are

interested in good government and in putting Northern Ireland first to do so, too.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank Ms Purvis for her initiative in bringing the Bill before the Assembly for its Consideration Stage. I congratulate her for being in full legislative mode, particularly as those of us who have been here over the past two weeks have seen nothing emanate from the Executive. It is good to see someone take the initiative. It is good to see that, through the introduction of the Bill, she has possibly paved the way for what the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister should, in fact, be doing.

I will outline the SDLP's views on the various proposed amendments to the Bill. I have heard the arguments for full participation in local government, through which many people who take the pathway to politics — indeed, it has become a career — are facilitated, taken further and receive the experience that they need. Probably two thirds of Members in the Chamber cut their teeth in local government. Through it, we gained the experience that was required to bring us to where we are today. We should be grateful for the valuable learning curve that local government was in preparing us for the Assembly, not only in dealing with and manoeuvring through the political world but in dealing with people, which is why we are here today.

It is interesting that people should be a theme, because, at present, in the community and society at large, many people find their situation extremely difficult. I point at no particular political party: we must all take the mote from our eyes, whether we are on this side of the Chamber or the other. I do not talk about the House of Lords often. In fact, I rarely think of it. However, we could probably agree that there is a mote in all our eyes and that people who are in difficult financial circumstances find it hard to believe that others are, as they see it, double-jobbing.

Mr Ross referred to that theme. He may well have to give explanations for those who seem to manipulate the electoral system cynically. Earlier, reference was made to those who are seen perhaps to manipulate the situation whereby they stand for election in the full knowledge that they will get elected to both the council and the Assembly and will possibly serve neither post or contrive some sort of situation. It is down to the rest of us and to the

political parties to which we belong to ensure that those who stand for election do so for the most laudable and genuine of reasons, which is to serve the people who elected them.

Earlier, double-jobbing was mentioned. I used to be a councillor. In the Committee for the Environment, there have been occasions on which there was potential for conflict. For example, one would discuss legislation as an MLA that clearly conflicted with one's position as a councillor. The legislation may have related to potential financial gain, such as councillors' allowances or pay-offs. All those matters came before the Committee. Regardless of the time-management issues to which Mr Kinahan rightly referred, if there is conflict for an MLA, I dread to think what it is like for the Minister who has responsibility for local government. What difficulties arise there?

I want to outline the SDLP's standpoint on the various amendments that are before the House. Amendment No 1 would amend clause 1 so that an MLA would be disqualified from being a councillor. My party is in favour of that, which is consistent with our position in Committee. You, Mr Deputy Speaker, were a member of the Committee by that time.

5.45 pm

Amendment No 2 relates to the time limit for a councillor being disqualified, specifying that it will happen after 60 days. Again, that is consistent with our position at Committee, and the SDLP is in favour of that. The SDLP is in favour of clause 1.

The SDLP is in favour of amendment No 3, which was tabled by the sponsor of the Bill. The SDLP supports clause 2, amendment Nos 4 and 5, clause 3, amendment Nos 6 and 7, and the long title.

Mr Ross: I thank the Member for giving way. Given that the SDLP is so firmly behind this legislation and ending dual mandates between the Assembly and local government, can I presume that his party is also keen to end the dual mandate of its three MPs as Members of Westminster and this House?

Mr McGlone: You are referring to the conflict that there may well be for those who are MPs and MLAs. Well, I have a wee announcement to make. There are measures in process at the moment, including a selection convention in

Derry, starting on Friday evening. You would probably argue that we are following your lead, but it is a matter that the party has been dealing with over the past couple of years by rolling out a process. I thank you for your guidance and I look forward to reciprocation in that other House that I do not mention too often.

Dr Farry: I declare an interest as a proud member of North Down Borough Council, where I have almost 18 years of very good experience. I may well be stepping down at the next election. It is not something on which I have taken a final decision just yet. If I do step down, it will be based on my judgement on the level of people who are coming through in my area.

Mr T Clarke: For clarification, given that the Member has 18 years in local government, did he have that in his literature when he stood for election? I am sure that he did not hide the fact that he was a councillor from the wider public, and they still returned you. Is that the case?

Dr Farry: Oh yes, definitely. When I stood for the Assembly in 2007, it was perfectly clear that I was a councillor. That was in my election literature. There is full transparency around exactly how I conduct myself, and I have no difficulty with that whatsoever. It is important that my judgement on whether I stand down will be based on whether people are coming through the association who can be potential candidates for local government. I am certainly not intending to block people who are coming through but, equally, if the view is that I should still play a useful role in local government, I am open to that.

Mr McGlone: Mr Farry, I am not being in any way pernicky about this, but you are saying that it is your decision. Could you clarify whether the party has a view on that?

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

Mr McGlone: Sorry. Excuse me.

Dr Farry: The Alliance Party certainly does have a view on it: we leave it open to the individual discretion of the member to make the best judgement. I am certainly not going to stand here and argue that there are not circumstances in which someone can be a Back-Bench MLA and a councillor. The areas where there are conflicts of interest of a personal nature, as has been mentioned, are extremely limited. Frankly,

this Assembly takes decisions regarding pay and conditions, so in that respect, we all have conflicts of interest whenever we are here.

Issues relating to what happens in a council area are matters of policy; they are not matters of personal interest. I expect that anyone who serves in local government and the Assembly is there to act in the best interests of their constituents as they see it. I do not detect any pattern here of those who happen to be councillors being more pro local government than others. It cuts across all parties. Parties have their own views and they stick to them, so it does not really matter whether someone is a councillor.

I have the view that I am a more rounded public representative by virtue of my being in both chambers, because one often comes across an issue that may be something for the Northern Ireland Administration and local government to consider. It means that the issue can be worked at both ends. It could be passed on to a colleague in the council, but that is not as quick and efficient a method as dealing with it oneself.

Ms Purvis: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Can you clarify whether the Member is addressing the amendments or giving his opinion on double-jobbing?

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind the Member to stick to the Bill.

Dr Farry: I am happy to do that. However, I remind the Member who raised the issue that, if she cares to read the Official Report tomorrow, she will see that she drifted substantially from the amendments. One needs to be consistent in these matters, and I fear that she has opened the parameters of the debate through the precedent that she set in that regard.

I will move on to the issues in hand. It is my view that the Bill is flawed. We were clear on that point during Second Stage. The issue that we should be discussing is the dual mandate between a MLA who happens to be a Minister but who is also a councillor. That is an area of concern and one to which we should be attending through legislation. That issue has not been addressed.

Another issue that has not been addressed is the continuation of MP/MLA double-jobbing. Frankly, the two cannot be separated. We talk

about dual mandates and double-jobbing, but when we talk about an MP and an MLA, we are talking about double-jobbing, because they are both full-time jobs. One is based in Westminster, and one is based in Belfast. One cannot be in two places at the same time. The attitude from a number of parties on that issue is absolutely breathtaking. It takes my breath away that SDLP Members in particular, who sit behind me, can sit here and lecture on the MLA/councillor dual mandate while not being prepared to face up to the reality of what is happening in their party, given that all three of their MPs are MLAs.

Mr McGlone: Will the Member give way?

Dr Farry: I will give way in a minute.

Mr McGlone says that the party is sorting the issue out in Foyle first of all and is then rolling it out. He says that his party has a process in mind. I think that the process will stop at one Member, because it has been made clear that Margaret Ritchie has no intention of stepping down from either role, and neither has Alasdair McDonnell. They have said that on the public record; I can read the papers as well as anyone else here. Those Members talk about a process being in hand, and they say that these things take time to work through, but the legislation is perfectly clear and could be implemented very quickly. Naomi Long was elected at the same time back in May that Mr Durkan, Ms Ritchie and Mr McDonnell were elected. She stepped down. The DUP MPs who were MLAs stepped down. I do not know why the process in the SDLP world works slower than it does in any other party.

Mr McGlone: Thank you for giving way, Mr Farry, and thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for affording me the chance to intervene. Perhaps I will draw my own breath from that period of breathlessness that I contracted from Mr Farry. I noticed that he talked in great length about his decision. I see that he has now extended his decision-making process into the party behind him. I thank him for his wee bit of guidance. However, we will be making our own decisions.

Dr Farry: The Member's party is not making its own decisions; it is proposing to come here today to pass a piece of legislation that makes decisions affecting not only everyone else in here but people who might wish to stand for the Assembly and local government. Therefore, the issue extends beyond what happens with the SDLP. There are also issues with consistency

and with how the SDLP approaches the matter by lecturing other people while not addressing the issues at home.

There is a tendency for Members to take the attitude of "Oh Lord, make me virtuous — but not just yet." That attitude applies also to the Ulster Unionists to an extent. There is the feeling that the issue creates a problem and that it takes time to work through the issues. Parties talk about the procedures that they have to plod through. If people are serious in thinking that it is wrong for someone to be a councillor and an MLA, the party leaders should direct all the councillors and the MLAs who are affected to step down from the council or the Assembly with immediate effect. It takes about two minutes to type out a resignation letter. Once the letter is tabled, the party leader should put in process the selection meetings in the associations to put in place the replacements. It is not a convoluted process. If people are serious about it and want to be consistent, they should sort it out now and address the problem.

Mr McDevitt: I am listening attentively. In my humble opinion, this is not one of the Member's finest contributions to the House, I must say, but I am trying to understand exactly what he is trying to get to. Is he trying to say that the Alliance Party's policy on the Bill is that it has no policy on the Bill?

Dr Farry: I think the difficulty Mr McDevitt has is that he does not agree with what I am saying. The view of the Alliance Party is that it is fundamentally wrong for a person to be an MP and an MLA, and Naomi Long addressed that issue when she was elected to Westminster. We believe that it is wrong for somebody to be a Minister and a councillor, and David Ford addressed that when he was appointed Justice Minister.

The issue about whether our party candidates must go for one or the other has been left to the discretion of the individual, and there is no party bar on that happening. Of course, the Assembly may take the decision out of our hands by passing legislation that influences that, but we will see what happens with that. However, the party does have a clear policy on the issue, which is to leave it to the discretion of the individual. No doubt that will be taken into account at the selection meetings of our associations across Northern Ireland.

I am conscious that I had better move on to the specifics of the amendments. There are some aspects of the amendments that make what is a bad and flawed situation better. I appreciate that the revised draft of clause 1 outlined in amendment No 1 addresses a situation that could have been a clear breach of people's human rights in relation to the freedom to stand for election. However, I fear that it is still a convoluted system, and the explanation itself was rather convoluted. I fear that it will be viewed as being somewhat cynical.

Amendment No 2 is better, with a slightly clearer separation distance between the two. That would be my preference, but I think it is still a rather unsatisfactory situation, for a whole host of reasons. In relation to how the procedures work in and around AGMs, I do not think that this will make a terrible amount of difference either way, and the parties will sort those things out between them on councils.

It has been said that it is bad to legislate for what will be a one-off situation, which, I take it, means the coincidence of an Assembly election and a local government election at the same time, as we expect to be the situation next year. However, I fear that that is actually going to be the norm for many years to come because, if we have a full four years of the next Assembly and a full four years of local government, in 2015, we will probably be faced with elections on the same day, so the issue is going to repeat itself. That pattern could then repeat itself every four years in the future if we are in a situation of political stability.

To further complicate things, if I dare, if the current Westminster Parliament goes its full distance, which I think the coalition partners will seek to do, we are likely to have an election to Westminster in the spring of 2015 as well. It is entirely conceivable that the powers that be may, in order to avoid inconvenience to the electorate, have all three elections on the one day. We could see a triple-complicated situation, where people are standing for three different elected bodies at the same time, with the difficulty of trying to unpick their way through all that.

The fundamental problem that I have with the Bill is the way in which the electorate will view the outcome if people can stand for election to the Assembly and local government on the same day and are elected to both. I do not think that it is right to tell someone that they have

to make a choice between one or the other, because people will be unsure of what their fate will be with the electorate. Anyone who goes in to any election expecting to be elected is showing the height of arrogance, because the decision ultimately lies with the people, and we have to be humble in that regard. When people apply for jobs, they do not apply for them one after the other. If someone is interested in representing their community, they seek to apply to a number of different avenues.

Mr McDevitt: I am not sure what analogy the Member is trying to draw. It appears to me that he is trying to argue that we should all be given the right to hedge our bets around here.

Of course, that is only if you are hedging your bets in politics. I am sure that the Member would not agree that I should have remained on as, for example, managing director of a large public affairs agency until the next Assembly election just so that I could have the privilege of not having to take the risk of coming here to represent the people. So, if it could not apply in that scenario, how could it apply within politics?

6.00 pm

Dr Farry: There is a difference between the risk that someone takes when they take up a paid post in an elected body and someone wishing to stand for different bodies on the same day. Although Mr McDevitt had to step down from his post when he was co-opted to the Assembly, there are people who take a leave of absence from their place of employment when they serve as elected representatives, and they can potentially go back to those posts if they step down or, unfortunately, do not get re-elected.

Mr Weir: Will the Member agree that it is extremely brave and honest of Mr McDevitt to, in effect, condemn his colleague Mr Maginness, who is a practising barrister at the same time as being as being an MLA? Will the Member join me in saluting the political courage of Mr McDevitt in taking that stance? *[Laughter.]*

Dr Farry: I will let that stand without any further contribution.

It is one thing for people to step down during their term of office, whether through ill health or other fundamental changes in circumstance, or, as some have done, to genuinely avoid double-jobbing. We then avoid a by-election and all the cost that that entails. There are

also the implications of having by-elections in divided societies with regard to the balance of representation going askew. Compare that with people being elected one day and stepping down from office several days later, or, under amendment No 2, 60 days later, which in itself does not fundamentally address the issue.

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

In this country, people do not vote based purely on party. Of course, judging from how elections work out here sometimes, one could reach the conclusion that they do. However, we have a fundamental tradition in this society of people voting, first, for an individual, and, secondly, for the party. Historically, only individual names were put on ballot papers, with party names being added in only the past 15 to 20 years. Therefore, the whole focus of our democracy is based on the election of the individual, not the party. If the party were the focus, we would simply have wider constituency lists or a Northern Ireland-only list, similar to the lists in many European countries. We vote on the basis of the individual and their party label, in that order, and people will make that judgement. The electorate will view it as highly cynical if, having voted for a named individual in the expectation that that person will serve that term, whether in the Assembly or, more likely, in local government, that person then steps down from one post after only a matter of days because they happen to be elected to one or more posts. That is the height of political betrayal.

I hear comments about people cynically putting big names on the ballot paper to get other people in. The Alliance Party will not be playing any such games. When people from this party stand for election next year, they will be fighting that election with the genuine intention of serving in the roles to which they are elected. That will be the choice that they make, and the party will expect people to do that. If their circumstances change through ill health or for other reasons and they have to step down, that is fine. However, doing so purely as what could be construed as a cynical move in the immediate aftermath of an election will be viewed very negatively by the electorate.

We also need to be cautious about even the co-options to this Assembly over the past year. Those occurred well into the lifetime of this Assembly, largely in the context of people stepping down to avoid being accused of

double-jobbing, and often at the instigation of the media. The media then complain about the number of people in the Chamber who are not elected. If the media are complaining about the number of people in this place who are not elected in the final year of a four-year term, what on earth will the media say when a raft of people elected as councillors step down within days of being elected?

We need to be realistic about what we are opening up. The approach of parties and individuals could be viewed as extremely cynical.

My final point relates to gender and diversity in politics. The Alliance Party knows more than most in that regard. So far, the evidence is that co-option has not much improved diversity in the Chamber. Indeed, others have made the point that, in some respects, it has sent diversity into reverse. The real challenge with respect to diversity lies with political parties. They must encourage a diverse range of people to put themselves up for selection and, at selection meetings, ensure that diversity is reflected as candidates come through.

As I make that point, I think of one prominent example that appeared in the media in the past few weeks. Naomi Long stepped down as a Member of the Assembly and was replaced by Chris Lyttle. That replacement was based on a democratic selection within the Alliance Party. The decision was not imposed from the top but was made by the grass roots. It was a contested selection meeting at which a number of people from a range of backgrounds put their names forward. When Naomi Long stepped down from Belfast City Council, she was replaced by another woman. Therefore, we had one woman in her 30s being replaced by a younger man and a younger woman. I think that that is pretty good going as regards diversity. I will leave it there.

Mr Givan: I caution Members against taking sharp intakes of breath. The stench of hypocrisy coming from some Benches is liable to cause them to pass out. I will illustrate the point further and continue the arguments put forward by my colleague Alastair Ross, a Member for East Antrim.

Let us be clear. My party has taken action on double-jobbing. We need to clarify that double-jobbing, in the context of Westminster and this Assembly, is full-time employment that attracts a full-time salary. This party has made a clear distinction between those two roles.

We have taken proactive steps to address that already. Currently, we are the only party — I include the Alliance Party in that — that has taken steps in that regard. Some 80% of our Members of Parliament have stepped down from the Assembly, whereas 100% of the SDLP Members of Parliament continue to double-job in a full-time capacity, as do 100% of Sinn Féin Members of Parliament. We cannot have the argument from Sinn Féin that their Members of Parliament do not take their salary. Sorry, but if someone is elected to serve their constituency as a Member of Parliament, they are there to do that in a full-time capacity whether or not they take the salary. That is a matter for that party. Likewise for members of the SDLP; if they are serving their constituents in a full-time capacity as a Member of Parliament, that is what they should do full time.

Mr Poots: Does the Member agree that the SDLP is oozing hypocrisy today by taking the stance that it has done? Mr McGlone says that one of their MPs will be standing down in the next few weeks and that they are putting the arrangements in place. Meanwhile, Dr McDonnell states clearly that he is standing again for both Houses, as does Ms Ritchie. Therefore, the SDLP is taking a wholly hypocritical position. Sinn Féin's five MPs still take all their allowances at Westminster and, I assume, claim that they carry out many of the functions of MPs so that they are able to take those allowances. Therefore, they are equally hypocritical. They would ban someone from doing a part-time job but allow others to do two full-time jobs. That is total hypocrisy.

Mr Givan: The Member makes a valuable contribution, and I thank him for it.

Mr McDevitt: I thank the Member for giving way. I do not want to turn this into a habitual giving-way exercise. However, the Minister of the Environment is responsible for the implementation of the Bill. I do not mean to lecture him or colleagues on the content of the Bill, but all his comments are entirely irrelevant to it and out of context. He may like to note that what we are debating is a Bill that disqualifies membership of this House and local government. That is something that he might want to reflect on himself.

Mr Givan: I thank the Member for his contribution. He asks the Minister to reflect on it. Perhaps he is unaware that the Minister

is not a member of local government and has resigned that position, unlike the Member's party colleagues in this Assembly who continue to retain their seats in Westminster.

It is very clear that there is hypocrisy in this Chamber. The Member for South Antrim Mr Kinahan has pontificated about the virtues of focusing on one role in a full-time capacity. I think he makes an important contribution; however, if he refers not just to councillors, but to Members of this institution who have any other role, he may reflect on the private activities that he has registered. Maybe he will speak to his party leader who, in the Register of Members' Interests, has declared that he is a part-time farmer.

Mr T Clarke: The Member may have missed a point when he was referring to my colleague from South Antrim, and I should declare an interest as a member of Antrim Borough Council. One reason why the Member for South Antrim resigned from council was that he could not cope with both roles. Maybe that reflects the difference in the quality between candidates from one particular party and another; some can cope and others cannot. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Givan: The Member has reminded me that I should declare my interest as a proud member of Lisburn City Council. When I look at the Members supporting Mr Kinahan, I see Roy Beggs, who, correct me if I am wrong, is an elected member of Carrickfergus Borough Council; Mr Leslie Cree, a member of North Down Borough Council; Mr McClarty, who is no longer here, is also a councillor; and Mr George Savage is a member of Craigavon Borough Council. Yet, they have the bare-faced cheek to pontificate and lecture Members on these Benches about people not focusing on their roles in a full-time capacity.

The Ulster Unionist Party never raised the issue of the particular double-jobbing role of MPs who are also MLAs until the electorate dealt with them and removed all their MPs who were double-jobbing as MLAs. However, now, they lecture us on the virtues of focusing on one particular job.

Mr Beggs: Is the Member aware of the controversy at the first Assembly election when we prevented our many Members of Parliament from standing specifically to prevent double-jobbing?

Mr Givan: No; I was not aware of that controversy, but it does not surprise me that there was internal wrangling within the Ulster Unionist Party. *[Laughter.]* I am sure that will not come as a shock to the public.

Mr Poots: Perhaps the Member can assist the Member's recollection that it was only those anti-Agreement MPs who were not allowed to stand; pro-Agreement MPs such as Ken Maginnis, David Trimble and John Taylor were allowed to stand.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Members to concentrate on the Bill. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Givan: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker; I will move on.

I listened to the Chairperson of the Committee's lecture on how the public would look with disdain on the income of Members in this institution who are also councillors, but I went through the Register of Members' Interests in preparation for the debate. Again, Members can correct me if I am wrong when I go through the list.

Sinn Féin fundamentally agrees on a point of principle. My party has taken action on its MPs without the need for legislation. Likewise, Sinn Féin could take action without the need for legislation. We know that, as the Marxist organisation it is, if a diktat comes from on high, its members had better agree with it. Let that party give that diktat to its members, and let them take it, if it is a matter of principle. However, of the Members here with us: Mr Billy Leonard is a member of Coleraine Borough Council; correct me if I am wrong. Mrs Michelle O'Neill is a member of Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council —

Some Members: And mayor.

Some Members: Chairperson.

Mr Givan: She is Chairperson of the council. Mr John O'Dowd is a member of Craigavon Borough Council; you, Mr Deputy Speaker, are a member of a council and serve on a District Policing Partnership. Of course, I support your activities there as well as on the transition committee; you are being remunerated for both. Mr Barry McElduff is a member of Omagh District Council. I will give way to any of those Members if they want to correct me if I am wrong. Mr Alex Maskey may have an announcement on this: I am not sure; but I have heard rumours. *[Laughter.]* He is

a member of Belfast City Council. Mr Daithí McKay is a member of Ballymoney —

Mr Boylan: No.

Mr Givan: I am sorry; I stand corrected on that. I am happy to withdraw that, through the Chair. Mrs Claire McGill is a member of Omagh District Council —

Some Members: Strabane.

Mr Givan: I am sorry; that should be Strabane District Council: I am sorry to have insulted Omagh.

Mr Fra McCann is a council member: I will withdraw that statement if it is not accurate. Mr Willie Clarke is obviously still a Member, and, of course, I have the unfortunate privilege of knowing Mr Paul Butler from my council.

6.15 pm

That is the list of Sinn Féin Members who also serve on councils. I do not know whether they pocket that money or whether it goes into the central coffers of Sinn Féin. Nevertheless, through the Assembly and the councils, the party or its members receive that money. When we talk about the public looking on and thinking that this is about the finances of individual Members, they will smell the stench of hypocrisy from the Members opposite.

It is not only Members of the Assembly about whom we are talking in respect of whether they are able to do the job and whether other jobs distract them from the work of the Assembly or affect their ability to carry out their council duties. If we are to be consistent about the matter, we have to ask whether members of councils who are in full-time employment should be barred from holding office in council. Is that a distraction? Can they not carry out that duty because of their full-time employment? What about those who receive money from the taxpayer, whether they are teachers, doctors, nurses, dentists —

Mr Bell: Or a GP.

Mr Givan: Or a GP — absolutely. Should those individuals who receive money from the taxpayer be barred from holding office in a council? Are they not able to do the job? If we are to be consistent in this regard, let us apply it across the board. That is where the Bill is fundamentally flawed.

I asked whether Members of the Assembly are able to do the job if they sit on a council. In the previous session, the voting record of the parties shows that the Democratic Unionist Party topped the poll, with an 81% average voting record; the SDLP came second with 78%; Sinn Féin came third with 74%; the Alliance Party came fourth with 66%; and in last place, given that I listened to the piety of the individual as he lectured us, was the Ulster Unionist Party with 60%. The public will see that it is the DUP that delivers on the ground and in the Chamber.

Mr Kinahan: We should ask the Member whether the same percentages apply in respect of time spent in Committee. In most Committee meetings that I have attended, his party is probably the worst for remaining in Committee meetings for their duration.

Mr Givan: I thank the Member for his contribution. When I looked at the Committee attendance record, of the top 10 Members in respect of their highest —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I ask Members to return to the Bill. Committee business and other business may be very interesting, but this Bill is being discussed today.

Mr Givan: The amendments are about disqualifying MLAs from being councillors, so we need to ask ourselves whether those MLAs are doing the job. We will then know whether they should be disqualified from councils. That is the point that I am trying to make. Seven of the top 10 MLAs with the highest attendance record were from the DUP. I thank the Member for his contribution.

If political parties are removed, the independent average vote record was 46%.

Mrs D Kelly: Will the Member give way?

Mr Givan: I am going to continue this theme. I will be happy to give way at a later point. The independent average voting record was 46%. Indeed, the Member who proposed the Bill had a voting record of 23%, which is the worst of any Member. She does not have a council role to distract her from carrying out her duties in the Assembly, yet she languished in joint last position for her voting record.

The public will see which parties are committed to these institutions and which carry out the work, not only here but in local government. The Ulster Unionist Party Member for South Antrim

indicated that his party is taking time to address the issue. The Ulster Unionist Party Member from my constituency indicated, perhaps two or three years ago, that he was opposed to MLAs being on councils, so the Bill clearly affects him. He said that he was opposed to that and would step down from the council, but he is still a member of Lisburn City Council. He indicated then that his party was searching for talent before he stepped down. Maybe that indicates the lack of talent in Lagan Valley.

However, the Member for Lagan Valley from the Ulster Unionist Party sits on only two Lisburn City Council committees. He could have attended a maximum of 28 meetings in that institution last year but attended only 16. Indeed, he attended less than 50% of meetings of the full council. When I considered the Bill, I looked across at other Members of the Assembly — I was not one during that period — and compared their records. Alderman Jeffrey Donaldson, who is no longer a member of Lisburn City Council or of this institution, had a better attendance record than the Ulster Unionist Member for Lagan Valley.

Mrs D Kelly: Will the Member give way?

Mr Givan: I will keep going before giving way again.

Indeed, the Minister of the Environment, who is here and who had that responsibility to carry out, attended 45 meetings throughout that recording year, a 78% attendance record whenever it came to the two committees that the Member for Lagan Valley from the Ulster Unionist Party could have attended. The Alliance Member, Trevor Lunn, who is also a member of Lisburn City Council, attended 55 official meetings of the council during the same reporting year. Jonathan Craig, my colleague, attended 57 official meetings that year, and, of the 28 meetings that Basil McCrea could have attended, he attended 24.

I make the point that, where Members are not able to do the job, they should reflect on whether they should be in that position. However, where Members are clearly and evidently doing the job, the Bill would put them out of that position when the evidence has shown that they have done that job very well. We need to be consistent, and we must be consistent on private interests, in terms of the income that individuals earn, not just from local councils but also in a private capacity.

Members need not look much further than the House itself for those among them whose attention is divided. The independent Member for West Tyrone, who has one of the worst voting records in the Assembly, indicated to the 'Irish News' during the summer, in response to what was said about his poor attendance record as an MLA:

"I'm committed to working two days a week".

I checked what salary he drew from this place, and he drew the same amount as every other Member, yet he has put on record that he works only two days a week as an MLA. His declaration in the Register of Members' Interests shows that, as a medical practitioner, he draws a salary of £65,000. Therefore, when we look at what Members do in this Chamber and on councils, let us not look beyond what is going on among the ranks of some individuals in this institution. The stench of hypocrisy will be clearly evident to the public when they read the Hansard report.

Mrs D Kelly: Will the Member give way?

Mr Givan: I will, yes.

Mrs D Kelly: I thank the Member for eventually giving way. I note that the Member failed to place on record the abysmal attendance of his party colleague Stephen Moutray, who is on one of the most influential Committees of the House, the Public Accounts Committee. Is it not the case that he has the worst attendance of any Member of the House who sits on that Committee?

I also note that on the issue of the Register of Members' Interests, he did not comment on slivers of land being registered by any Member of the House. He also referred to Committee meetings. Does the Member share my concern that, although the Committee for the Office of the First and deputy First Minister includes two members from his party and two from Sinn Féin, its forward work programme for December contains absolutely no business from OFMDFM?

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Members that they must address the contents of the Bill. Although the wider-ranging discussion may be interesting, I ask Members to return to the Bill.

Mr Givan: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I note that, in the Member's contribution to the debate, she did not declare an interest as a member of Craigavon Borough Council. Again, the public will see the hypocrisy. I will not take any lectures

from the SDLP on this issue when 100% of their Members of Parliament continue as Members of this institution.

When they put their house in order and when Sinn Féin puts its house in order, other Members will take the Bill a lot more seriously.

Mr A Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I am not sure whether we need to stop to draw breath. On behalf of Sinn Féin, I support the Bill, and I commend Dawn Purvis for persisting with the legislation. Although it has taken a while to get to where we are, the legislation is timely, and, on that basis, we are prepared to support it. As my colleague Cathal Boylan outlined, bar amendment No 2, we are prepared to support all the amendments, which are technical and logical consequences of the legislation.

We are not taking a high-horse approach to the Bill, because the development of politics here is still in somewhat of a transitional era. Consequently, certain decisions must be taken. It is fair to say that, ultimately, all parties here are committed to ending all forms of multiple mandate, so, obviously, they will address the situation. Commendably, some parties have begun to address it, including the DUP, which, as I outlined earlier, has agreed to some of its MPs standing down. Therefore, there is no question that that party understands the need to remove some of the clear anomalies. Yes, we have five MPs and, yes, most if not all of them were elected on the basis of being active abstentionists, which was the mandate that the electorate endorsed. That is their choice and, more importantly, it is the people's will, so we stand by it. However, ultimately, do we want to end the dual mandates of MLAs and MPs? Of course we do, and we hope to address the matter as early as possible. That is on the record.

I will not lecture any party about what it should do, but it is right and appropriate that some Members opposite drew attention to the hypocrisy to which we have had to listen. I would like everyone to say that they know that there is a need to end dual mandates and to support the legislation, because, although my party wants to end all multiple mandates, we also want to ensure that the Assembly continues to operate, which it has continuously and for longer than any Assembly formed since the Good Friday Agreement.

We support the legislation because we believe that it is timely and appropriate to bring an end to dual mandates between local councillors and MLAs. I do not accept Mr Kinahan's assertion that people may wish to pursue higher political ambitions. I am not sure about the terminology that he used, but I believe that he referred to people in local government moving higher up the scale to become MLAs, or possibly further. We do not accept any difference in status between councillors, MLAs, MPs, MEPs, TDs or Senators. However, given that Sinn Féin is the only all-Ireland party in the Chamber, I appreciate that that does not apply to anybody else.

Mr McDevitt: I hate to correct the Member; however, if he were here, I am sure that Mr Wilson would want him to acknowledge that Sinn Féin is not, in fact, the only all-Ireland party in the Chamber.

Mr A Maskey: If the Member had actually listened, instead of just trying to get a sound bite in every now and then, he would have heard me say that there was nobody else in the Chamber. He should try listening for a while, because it is a good habit.

I accept that some DUP Members are annoyed about the hypocrisy coming from this side of the Chamber, because we had to listen to Patsy McGlone suggesting that, somehow or other, his party is moving forward and has a process that will resolve the issue in Derry in a few days, when we know that, like the magic roundabout, one leader of his party left because he felt that he could not occupy two posts, yet his new party leader came in saying that she could definitely manage both posts.

That is fine for that party, but the public needs to make up its own mind; it is for the public to decide. However, it is a bit hypocritical for Mr McGlone to make that kind of reference; in fact, it is probably somewhat disingenuous.

6.30 pm

Equally, Mr McDevitt tried to extol his personal virtues. I do not know the circumstances in which he left his last job, but he certainly — *[Interruption.]*

Mr McDevitt: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I appreciate the cut and thrust of parliamentary debate and that we speak here under privilege. However, Alex Maskey should reflect very carefully on his remarks about

the reasons why people give up professional employment to come into public office. I certainly do not want to have to read Hansard tomorrow and have to cause him to reflect further on those remarks.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind all Members to moderate their language and consider what they say in advance.

Mr A Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Member for his intervention, although I do not know its relevance, nor do I understand what he means. Perhaps I touched a raw nerve. Nevertheless, when the Member was seeking to extol his virtues in that manner, he did not refer to his constituency colleague, who has registered about five interests, including those of GP and farmer and others relating to medical tests and so forth. The list seemed endless.

There is hypocrisy, and Members should be mindful that the public will, ultimately, want us to have a single mandate. Each mandate is a point of honour: first, we are all privileged to be selected by our party colleagues and peers, and then, more important, to be elected by the general public. Those mandates are given to us and we are privileged to exercise them. I believe that, deep down, each of us wants to exercise only one mandate at a time, given the importance of the mandate and the complementarity that each of those roles has to one another.

We all know the saying, "All politics is local". Local politics is very important, and I have cherished the past 27 years during which I have had the privilege of being elected to Belfast City Council. I am delighted to announce my resignation, as and from this week, from Belfast City Council. My party will continue to roll out that policy before the end of the current local government term and will bring an end to the exercise of councillor/MLA dual mandates.

In the next few days, my party will announce other councillor/MLA resignations in the greater Belfast area to facilitate an end to dual mandates. In our party's view, that is as much about allowing space for others to take up their rightful roles. The importance of diversity was mentioned earlier. It is also important that as we move ahead and consolidate our politics we create space for other people, particularly young people, as Stephen Farry said earlier, who can take up civic leadership roles that complement

the roles that we perform here. People who are MPs or who hold another office have a complementary role.

Mr Poots: Will the Member clarify what part of making way for younger people was missed in East Londonderry?

Mr A Maskey: I am not going to respond to that. I am trying to recognise that there are sensitivities in the Chamber and that not everyone fully agrees. I recognise that, in particular, people who have been in local government have a great attachment to it and cherish it. That is because it is local and because there is an intimate interface with the constituency. Anyone who does not value that or understand its importance is not living in the same political world as we are. I am simply saying that it is important. My contribution is not about hypocrisy, nor is it about lecturing anyone; it is about simply stating my party's view that where we can create space for other people to come in and refresh and rebuild local government, we will play our part in doing so.

As I said earlier, Sinn Féin has already commenced that process. Quite a number of our members have resigned their seats and been replaced in local government by colleagues. We will continue to roll out that programme over the days, weeks and months ahead to the point at which, probably before the end of the current council mandate, no one from Sinn Féin will hold a dual mandate as an MLA and councillor. In our opinion, that is very positive, and I look forward to it.

Somebody mentioned Paul Butler's experience in Lisburn. I am mindful that, over many years, councillors often bore the brunt of many of the problems in this place. Our party led the way in breaking through the rock face of discrimination that was known as Belfast City Council, which was renowned around the world as a bastion of bigotry. There have been big changes, which were brought about because, over the years, many people put their shoulder to the wheel to try to make the place better. Unfortunately, however, people on other local councils still refuse to share power or civic posts. That is regrettable, but the Bill is an attempt to end dual mandates in local government and the Assembly.

We welcome the Bill, and we thank Dawn Purvis for introducing it. We support it, save, as I said, for amendment No 2. There has been gross hypocrisy. Members referred to double-jobbing,

but that is a bit of misnomer; it is sometimes more a case of multiple salaries. One Member said that a particular individual earns £65,000 as well as an MLA's salary and declares that the work is for two days a week. It is disgraceful that a person who subscribes to being a full-time elected representative should hypocritically lecture others about remaining in local government. Therefore, I accept that Members around the Chamber are annoyed about the tone that some adopted.

Sinn Féin is keen to support an end to all dual and multiple mandates. We are keen to place on the record that we have, in many ways, led the way. A number of our members have already resigned their seats and been replaced. I and many others will continue to roll out that process over the next number of days. Therefore, we welcome the Bill, which we think is timely. More importantly, we think that the Assembly has been stabilised to an extent.

One Member said that it was a matter of hedging bets. It is not; it is about being realistic and being politically responsible and mature. Parties and Members here have important constituencies to serve. They all take that responsibility seriously and will not abandon a mandate or a seat. All who are local councillors here will have many people urging them to stay on in local government because they are more accessible and often more attentive to their constituents' needs. That is not always the case, but, for the most part, councillors are well recognised for their sterling work at a local level.

Sinn Féin does not accept the notion that one mandate is more important than another. All mandates are equally important and, in fact, complementary. I personally cherish the number of years during which I represented people in West Belfast and, in recent years, South Belfast. I have been given a mandate by the people there, and I dearly commit to continuing to serve them to the best of my ability. It is not only a matter of whether a Member has the ability to cope; it is a matter of serving the people. Members here have demonstrated that they are good local councillors, and some, perhaps, have been good MPs and good MLAs.

Over time, as we stabilise ourselves here, we should separate the mandates, bring more people into politics and make sure that each of us, at our own level, can devote the maximum amount of time and our undoubted talents to

the job at hand. In the Assembly, the job should focus on policy, strategy and legislation for the whole region. People at local government level should feed Assembly Members with the relevant information from their direct experience with constituents on the ground. I stress that all those roles are complementary, and, on my party's behalf, I commend the legislation, save for amendment No 2, and support the Bill.

Mr Beggs: I declare an interest as a local councillor. I congratulate the Member for bringing the Private Member's Bill to this stage. I am aware that it has taken a considerable amount of work, but it can assist in restoring confidence in the democratic process by widening and sharing political representation and by ending the dual mandate that has been widely practised. By sharing that responsibility, there will be less chance of abuse of power by its being concentrated in a few hands.

In supporting the Bill and the sponsor's amendments, I am clearly acting in community interest, not in self-interest. In contrast, a group to my left, the DUP, is clearly dissatisfied with the proposals. I remember that, when we discussed local government reform, we were advised that Members should not discuss matters that might improve their personal remuneration. Members need to be careful on the issue, and I hope that they have taken advice. They appear not to want to give up the additional £10,000 or £20,000 a year that they earn in addition to their salaries as Members.

Mr Weir: Has Councillor Beggs also taken that advice?

Mr Beggs: If you had listened to what I said, you would know that I support the Member's proposals and her amendments and that I could not be construed as acting in self-interest by potentially excluding myself at a future election. I would not be acting in self-interest. I wonder whether you can look at yourself in the mirror and say the same.

Mr Deputy Speaker: All remarks must be addressed through the Chair, please.

Mr Beggs: Members need to be careful, and I hope that some of them have taken advice that they do not take decisions that will potentially affect their financial remunerations by increasing the amount of money that they take home in their pay, because that, of course, would be entirely inappropriate.

At the Second Stage of the Bill, I commended the sponsor on the Bill's brevity, but, as it transpired, we came to appreciate how complex that brief Bill was. In Committee, I highlighted concerns that elections could be triggered on the day of the count by the disqualification of those who were elected. I do not believe that the community would think that the triggering of another election would be a sensible process. In fact, should that ever occur, there might be a very low turnout. Ms Purvis appears to have addressed those issues with this series of amendments, and I suspect that, when the amendments were brought late at Committee Stage, all Committee members were not fully aware of their significance.

I shall talk about amendment No 1. Now that the Assembly appears to be stable, it would be best if, in future elections, no one were to seek dual mandates and dual wages. More time could be committed to a single role, and, as I have said previously, trying to fulfil multiple mandates to one's utmost ability has a cost to personal life. I notice that I have not been criticised for my attendance, and I hope that someone will look at that, because I have honoured my mandates to the best of my ability. I find it rather annoying when Members come to Committees, get marked present to keep their score up and leave again. That is a cynical abuse of the system.

I notice that amendment No 1 does not prevent a Member from being elected as a councillor; rather, it prevents a Member from being a councillor. That follows Ms Purvis' wish not to prevent someone from being a candidate but to prevent dual mandates by allowing an individual to make a choice. The arrangement that she has come up with in the amendment would not exclude such a situation. An MLA could become a councillor if he or she were to resign as an MLA before the fourth day after the local government elections, when the results would be known. There is a provision for someone to do that if they wanted, but I do not think that that is particularly ideal. Nevertheless, it prevents any exclusion. As we are already aware in this place, co-option is possible to the Assembly without the need for Assembly by-elections. Of course, we must also be aware that both elections might take place on the same day, which could happen next May.

6.45 pm

If a sitting councillor were prevented from aspiring to be elected to the Assembly or from standing, it would be unhelpful to democracy. I notice that the amendment does not preclude that. However, it precludes Members from taking up both posts. Newly elected councillors are officially appointed on the fourth day after the election. Under Standing Order 3(3), an MLA does not take up the role, responsibilities and, indeed, the privileges of being a Member of the Assembly until he or she has signed the Roll of Membership. Therefore, someone who is elected as a councillor and an Assembly Member could simply delay signing the Roll of Membership in the Assembly until he or she has stood down as a councillor and then hand on that council role to someone else. Appointments that were made in such a fashion would enable a councillor to be replaced without triggering a by-election. However, that system could, of course, be abused, as some Members mentioned.

A sitting MLA who chooses to stand again as a Member of the Assembly and as a councillor can, potentially, abuse the provisions in the amendment. The electorate should, therefore, ask itself whether the co-option process is being abused and whether it will, in fact, get the councillors for whom it voted. I hope that the public scrutinise those issues in such a fashion that they ensure the end of dual mandates.

After discussions with the Bill Office about amendment No 2, I accept that it is unnecessary and that the amendments tabled by the proposer of the motion are sufficient. As there is a tight period within which one can stand down, a provision for disqualification to take effect after 60 days is unnecessary. That amendment should not be made, primarily because it would provide a degree of cover to anyone who wished to abuse the process by allowing him or her to be an MLA and a councillor for 60 days. If the amendment is made, I hope that nobody will choose to be an MLA and a councillor on the basis that the hypocrisy of abusing the situation would be too embarrassing and would highlight that the individual could not serve in that dual position. I, therefore, prefer the amendment tabled by the proposer of the motion to the amendment to introduce the 60-day process. If big hitters were cynically to stand for election as councillors simply to ensure election before standing down

to let others in, that would be outrageous. As a vote against amendment No 2 is more likely to prevent such a situation, I oppose it.

Amendment No 3 deals with a suitable time to start the process, and I think that the commencement of the next local government election is appropriate. Amendment Nos 4, 5 and 6 make provision for technical changes that flow from the change of tack that the Member had to make to address the Committee's concerns and to prevent triggering a number of by-elections. I support the amendments in the name of the proposer of the Bill and oppose amendment No 2.

Mr Weir: I declare an interest as a member of North Down Borough Council. Before I make my remarks, I will read a prepared statement on behalf of the Environment Committee. I assume that the Chairperson was not in a position to read the statement himself because of his party's position.

The Committee was concerned about the legalities and technicalities of the point at which disqualification from being a councillor takes place. In particular, members were concerned that, if a local government election and council election were to take place simultaneously, that might result in council seats still being vacant on the day of the first council AGM thereafter.

That situation could arise if there was insufficient time before the council AGM for parties to replace an individual who had been elected to both positions. Although the sponsor believed that the existing —

Mr Beggs: Will the Member give way?

Mr Weir: I am happy to give way. I am reading a prepared text on behalf of the Committee, but I will give way.

Mr Beggs: The Member indicated that the 60 days may allow parties time to organise. Does he accept that if the parties knew what the rules were well in advance, they could prepare themselves and would not need the 60 days should they allow a candidate to stand for both positions?

Mr Weir: I will finish the statement and then deal with the Member's point.

Although the sponsor believed that the existing provisions for replacing councillors could overcome those provisions, the Committee felt

that an amendment to clause 1 which would allow a period of 60 days to elapse before the disqualification took effect would be a prudent measure to include in the Bill. In the absence of an amendment from the sponsor to address that concern, the Committee has tabled its own amendment, amendment No 2, and it encourages Members to recognise the wisdom of its inclusion.

The Member may not be aware of all of the provisions as regards co-options, but quite often there is a 28-day period in which it can be resolved. Some action needs to be taken, and it could be that there is a vacancy when an AGM is called soon after an election. At that stage, some councils will apply some form of proportionality or d'Hondt. There is a question of whether a seat would count if it was decided in that manner, but certainly they would not be able to appoint people on that basis and a party could find itself being a seat down. Therefore, some common sense needs to be employed.

Given the experience that Mr Beggs has in local government, I am surprised at him. Given the lack of local government experience on the part of the Bill's sponsor, I am a little disappointed, but not entirely surprised.

Ms Purvis: Does the Member not recognise that amendment No 2 actually precludes parties from co-opting in that 60-day period? As the disqualification does not kick in for 60 days, parties will not be allowed to co-opt within that period of time, and the amendment that you are proposing would extend that period by up to three months. The amendment would mean that the disqualification would not come in for 60 days and the co-option regulations would not apply until after that period had passed.

Mr Weir: That is not the case. First of all, I am proposing the amendment on behalf of the Committee, so it is the Committee's proposal, if we are being strictly accurate. The amendment does not preclude a party from making a change within that period. There is nothing to stop someone leaving the council the day after the elections; that is not precluded under amendment No 2. I suspect that the Member does not know what the substance of that amendment is, but again I am not particularly surprised.

Many arguments have been raised during the debate, and there has been a degree of cut and thrust. Both my party and I raised a range of concerns about the Bill during its Second Stage

— concerns that have not been addressed by the amendments.

Mr Kennedy: Are you still Chairman?

Mr Weir: Sorry?

Mr Kennedy: Are you still Chairman?

Mr Weir: I appreciate the point that Mr Kennedy has made from a sedentary position. I am speaking now in my capacity as an MLA, having done the duty that Mr Boylan seemed reluctant to do earlier on — and I see him raising a glass to me, at least physically if not metaphorically. As a Member of the Committee and of the House, I, and other members of my party, raised a range of concerns at Second Stage that have not been dealt with by the amendments.

As the Bill came from someone who has never served a day in local government, it is not surprising that the complementarity between the role of local government and that of an MLA has not been recognised, and the amendments do not deal with that. The Bill is essentially anti-democratic, because, ultimately, the electorate should be allowed to choose who they want to represent them without any artificial barriers being put in place. As Mr Farry indicated, parties are perfectly entitled to take whatever action they have taken.

We were lectured earlier by Mr McGlone, who told us that the SDLP would take its own action; that it would be master of its own destiny. However, it seems that, through the Bill and the amendments, the SDLP is sending out a signal of: do as I say, not as I do. Unlike the Alliance Party, which has removed its Westminster MP and the Democratic Unionist Party, which has removed most of its Westminster MPs, 100% of the SDLP's MPs are still — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: All comments should be made through the Chair, please.

Mr Weir: Mark Durkan may make the supreme sacrifice in the next few days, but we see precious little evidence of the leader of the SDLP taking that course. Indeed, it is abundantly clear that the honourable Member for South Belfast — a Member both of this House and of another — has absolutely no intention of vacating either House. If Dr McDonnell is in the Building, he is akin to an Israeli settler: I suspect that he is building breeze blocks in his office upstairs to cement himself further into both Houses.

The SDLP dares to lecture us about dual mandates even though it has taken no action. I also have concerns about Sinn Féin, whose five MPs have taken no action. However, I appreciate Sinn Féin's point that their MPs do not take their seats. The parties expressing concern about the Bill are the only ones to have taken proactive steps, at the top level, to remove people from dual mandates and double-jobbing.

If it is wrong to be a full-time public representative as a councillor and an MLA, why is it not wrong to be paid out of the public purse and also be a councillor? The amendments do nothing to address that. Will councillors be drawn from people who have no other role in life? Perhaps, according to the proposer, that will be the case. Among the ludicrous claims made today is one that concerns the 60,000 unemployed. Presumably, the Bill is some form of job creation scheme that will open up vacancies on councils and people will work full time as councillors for £9,500. That is the import of what the proposer said earlier.

I believe in greater diversity of membership. We were told that the Bill will lead to more women filling places in local councils. However, as has been highlighted, the five major parties have filled all the vacancies that have occurred in the lifetime of this Assembly exclusively with men. Sinn Féin, the SDLP, the DUP, the Ulster Unionist Party and the Alliance Party are all guilty of that. The suggestion that the Bill will lead to a flowering of diversity beggars belief.

A fairly bad Bill has become even worse. The one argument used at Second Stage that contained any scintilla of persuasion was that the role of councillor would be expanded under the review of public administration due to the larger council areas and the additional functions. The argument was that the role of councillor would, therefore, simply not be compatible with the role of MLA from a practical point of view. However, that argument is dead in the water, at least for the time being, because we will not move to the review of public administration in 2011.

Mr Farry said that bringing local government experience to the Chamber was valuable. It cuts both ways. A mix of people who have been in the Assembly and their local council can help to bring a different perspective; that is of value to councils.

At this point, I pay tribute to all my colleagues on North Down Borough Council, including Councillor Easton MLA, Alderman Cree MLA, Alderman Wilson and Councillor Farry, all of whom have brought something additional to the council, in part because of their role in this House.

7.00 pm

Amendments Nos 4 to 7 are largely technical and, therefore, should not concern the House greatly, and amendment No 2 perhaps makes a very bad job marginally better, but the case remains unproven. Indeed, it has to be said that, rather than dealing with dual mandates as proposed by the Bill, we should deal with the double standards that appear to be all too evident.

We will oppose a number of the amendments and clauses, and we will look with forlorn hope to see whether any improvement can be made at Further Consideration Stage. We will also look to see whether the parties that are so keen to lecture us on dual mandates and double standards are prepared to step up to the plate and take action to remove their MPs from the Assembly. Let us see whether action is taken in connection with that. Let us see people being consistent in their approach. Let us see an end to double standards. What is before us today is a pale imitation of what legislation should be in this place, and, therefore, at this stage, we oppose it.

Mr Lyttle: I will do my best to keep my comments brief because we have had a fairly full exchange on the Bill. I am aware of the unique history that has led to the circumstances that we face, and I agree wholeheartedly with my colleague from East Belfast that establishing sound democratic principles, such as openness, transparency and accountability, must be a key aim of the House. However, I cannot agree that the Bill is the best way to achieve those aims.

I agree that the issue of multiple mandates is of concern to members of the public and should be of concern to Members of the House. Indeed, the Member who proposed the Bill would probably acknowledge that it is arguably more important for MPs and Ministers to consider whether it is right, proper and possible for them to serve more than one House. Although that is not a matter for consideration today, I believe that it has more significant implications.

That aside, I genuinely feel that it would be inadequate for the House to accept the Bill before us today without challenging the apparent perception that appears to have significantly motivated its composition. Many arguments have been put forward throughout all stages of the debate so far, but the lack of delivery on the review of public administration and local government reform have changed the context to a certain extent.

My party and I strongly agree with the principles of having a legislature that is reflective of our wider community and encouraging fresh, new voices into politics as a measure of how far our democratic process has come. Indeed, I stand here in the privileged position of serving the people of East Belfast as a result of party leadership showing themselves capable of exercising leadership on the issue in good time and by utilising the co-option procedure in the spirit and purpose for which it was intended.

It is important to reflect on the facts associated with the issue. The office of councillor is a part-time post that is designed to function alongside full-time jobs, be they professional, business, farming or factory jobs, with an allowance to cover reasonable expenses incurred rather than a salary as such. I have heard only a small number of reasons for the need to legally disqualify an MLA from holding that part-time office, and I am not sure that we should be further persuaded by any of them today.

Members would do well to challenge the perceptions that have been mooted in the debate before accepting any of the proposals as they stand. We heard that a main reason for the Bill is that the public regards a person who holds MLA and council positions as doing so for personal gain, be it to gain power or financial remuneration.

I ask Members whether they want to let such a perception go unchallenged. I am aware that a number of Members are also councillors. Although I might disagree strongly with their politics, I cannot question the standard of service that they offer to others before themselves.

I also find it difficult to accept the argument that it does not affect teachers and nurses or that, for example, a doctor who earns around £100,000 from the public purse and is tasked to work around 70 or 80 hours a week is less eligible for disqualification from holding a

council post than an MLA. I think that we need to consider carefully whether we should rule out participation in politics at that level by anyone in the aforementioned posts. I agree with the Member who said that the Assembly should encourage people from all walks of life to get involved in politics; people from a wide range of backgrounds, such as teachers, nurses, businesspeople, men, women, old people and young people.

I understand that at the Bill's Second Stage, the point was raised about the public perception of politicians as being people who give speeches and attend receptions. I find it hard to understand that there was no detailed attempt to explain the reality, which is that any politician worth his or her salt is operational 24/7 and sacrifices personal and family life in the process, regardless of mandate much of the time, to work on a multitude of constituency inquiries and strategic issues in the House.

It has been argued that introducing the legislation in order to respond to that perception will demonstrate political maturity. My party has already demonstrated that maturity in that a number of my senior colleagues have resigned from the Assembly and local councils in order to ensure that the party continues to offer constituents a wide range of dedicated and focused representatives and encourages a new generation of representatives into public service on local people's behalf.

As has been mentioned, Naomi Long committed to serve the people of East Belfast as a full-time MP if she was elected to Parliament. Due to her prompt delivery on that commitment, I have the privilege of representing our constituents in the House. My colleague Laura McNamee was also co-opted to Belfast City Council and is its youngest female councillor. Therefore, my party has exercised leadership in that area.

Mr McDevitt: Will the Member give way?

Mr Lyttle: I am just about to close my remarks. Go ahead.

Mr McDevitt: The leadership shown by the Alliance Party in East Belfast in dealing with Naomi Long's election to Westminster was laudable. However, clearly, the party's policy at local level, which is not to allow multiple mandates, is not one that it is willing to adopt at regional level. Perhaps, Mr Lyttle will inform

the House why a policy that is good in a constituency is bad in legislation.

Mr Lyttle: I thank the Member for his comment. I believe that my colleague Dr Farry has already responded to that issue in detail. My closing remarks relate to that point to a certain extent. My party is aware of public concern on the issue. It will continue to proactively deliver timely and progressive responses to the matter.

Mr McFarland: I have no declaration to make because I am the only North Down MLA who is not a councillor. I congratulate Dawn Purvis on steering her Bill this far.

The issue has bobbed around the Assembly during various talks processes, the Programme for Government Committee, and it is still with the Assembly and Executive Review Committee as we speak. Parties have actually changed their views. At one time, all parties agreed that multiple mandates were bad. The discussion was about the stage at which they should be knocked on the head. That was the only discussion that took place.

I support the Bill and most of the amendments because I believe that they are the right way to go. I understand why it has been difficult until now, and there have been endless arguments about why multiple mandates could not be removed sooner. Basically, it was because the Northern Ireland Assembly was unstable. Members were never sure whether they would be put out of their Assembly jobs and, therefore, they wanted to keep their Westminster or council seats. It is perfectly understandable, therefore, that it has gone on for so long.

However, it is politically unhealthy for the body politic in each of your parties to not have a system of bringing young people on from council to the Assembly or to Westminster. That is the way the progression should be. I do not understand why anyone needs two jobs, and I am particularly amazed at Stephen Farry, "Mr Democracy", and I think that the electorate in North Down would be mighty surprised to find out that he intends to go on double-jobbing from here on in.

Why is double-jobbing bad? The answer is that it bed blocks; it bed blocks political progress in your parties and it stops, in particular, women and young people moving on to the political ladder. That cannot be good for any of our parties.

Mr Ross: We have heard it claimed on numerous occasions that, if this legislation is passed, it will get more women and young people into local councils. There is no guarantee at all that that will happen. Who goes forward and replaces individuals depends on the selection process in each party. This legislation will not deliver more women and young people into local government, and it is a falsehood to suggest that it will.

Mr McFarland: That is not what I am saying. I understand that there is a difficulty, but if you have our Jimmy, aged 85, as an MLA and a councillor, there is no chance of someone — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. We have had a fair bit of banter across the Chamber, but if we want to make progress, it is not going to continue in that way. I ask Members to hold what they have to say until they are speaking. If they have nothing to say at that time, they should resume their seats. I will not allow the continuous banter from a sedentary position to continue.

Mr McFarland: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker.

As I said, double-jobbing prevents people becoming interested and getting involved in politics, and that is part of the difficulty.

Some argue that there is a need to retain experience, and we have heard that today. Of those councillors maintaining their dual mandate, we probably have two on any one council, because they are spread across the Province. So, are you seriously telling me that if two of your councillors do not go back into council again, the entire council — of, say, 25, 30, or 35 members — will collapse because the experience of two people is missing? That is a nonsense argument that really should not be made in this House.

Another issue is that double-jobbing interferes with the working of Committees here. I saw it happen in the first Assembly mandate, and I suspect that it is going in this one. During an afternoon Committee meeting, at 4.00 pm, in the middle of an evidence session, one suddenly hears a shuffling of papers, as councillor so-and-so decides that it is time to be on the road or he will miss his council meeting, because he has to get home to have his tea and then get to council. It interferes with the good working of this Assembly, and it is wrong. It used to happen as well with the MPs, who

would not turn up on a Wednesday or Thursday because they had to be at Westminster. That was wrong. We are sorting that out and that is very encouraging.

Mr I McCrea: We are sorting it out.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr McFarland: Absolutely, and fair play to you: you are sorting that out, but it was very unhealthy. In fact, at the beginning of this Assembly mandate, I sat on a Committee that had to meet on a Monday because the Chairman was an MP and he could not meet on a Wednesday or Thursday because he was in Westminster. That interferes with the good workings of this Assembly, and it should not happen. If everybody had one job, it would not happen.

Although they are pretending not to, parties see dual mandates as political advantage. Parties run their big hitters and we know, from looking at the results, that those big hitters can bring in certainly one, perhaps two, and sometimes three other councillors with them. Again, that is not a healthy way to operate. I can understand that parties are fearful that, if they stand their big hitters down, they will lose votes with somebody new coming in. I can understand that, but I also think that it is incredibly —

Mr Bell: Will the Member give way?

Mr McFarland: Let me finish this point.

It would be incredibly unhealthy for those big hitters to go into this next election and then stand down the moment that they get elected and after they have brought, perhaps, another two in with them. I do not think that the electorate will understand that, because it is cheating. It is cheating the electorate. It is going into the elections under false pretences, and I think that it is really dodgy.

7.15 pm

Mr Bell: Will the Member choose this moment to confirm or deny that he is hoping to rely on the big hitter Lady Hermon to bring him here next time?

Mr McFarland: I have been at this since 1995. I stood twice in North Down as a Westminster candidate. I got 7,500 votes in a by-election and, with 11,500 votes, came 1,400 behind Robert McCartney in a general election. The

people in North Down have a choice. They know me well enough by now; I am no surprise to them. I have been successful in every election to here. Furthermore, as colleagues know, the only reason why this place survived after the first Assembly election was because North Down produced three MLAs —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Can we return to the Bill?

Mr McFarland: I should not have risen to it.

Running the big hitters is cheating the electorate, if they are going to stand down straight after an election. They had this in Scotland, with the MSPs and MPs. They decided that they would run, and the press — the media — decided that that was not on. The media ran a campaign that so embarrassed them that only one, I think, stood on a dual mandate. Apart from some notable exceptions in media outlets here in Northern Ireland, the press has been supine about the issue. They have sat back and said nothing about whether it is right that somebody has two different jobs and is busy pulling two public salaries. The media needs to get interested in this. If it did, the electorate would get interested.

Those of you who are councillors will know that there are committee meetings and site meetings all the time. If anyone thinks that they can persuade the public that they can go forward and try to pretend that they are able to do a full day's work here five days a week, as well as a council job properly, they will be very lucky. We should have one candidate to one elected body. I support the Bill.

Mr Bell: I declare my proud membership of Ards Borough Council. People elected me to do a job, and I intend to do it. The question is twofold. It is a question of double jobs, which are two full-time jobs. Let us pare down to the logic: two full-time jobs you cannot do. It is simple. We do not have the leader of the SDLP here today, because she is ashamed to be here. If she were here, the spotlight would shine on her.
[Interruption.]

I will give way if somebody is going to tell me that either Dr McDonnell or the leader of the SDLP is going to give up one of their two jobs.

Mr McGlone: Oddly enough, the three SDLP MPs are not here because of the electoral reform Bill. Paradoxically, that is the case, as we

sit here today. They have duties elsewhere that they had to fulfil. That is where they had to be.

Mr Bell: The SDLP has just confirmed that its three MP/MLAs cannot do their jobs here today. There is an old saying that if you give someone enough rope, they will hang themselves. I gave them enough rope, and they jumped to hang themselves. To be fair to some of the Members, they put poor Mr McGlone up to hang himself on it. He has just confirmed that the SDLP MLAs cannot do two jobs. They cannot be in this House, on this debate, which is supposed to be of such great magnitude, because they have to be somewhere else.

Mr Beggs: Does the Member agree that it is for this House to determine whether there will be a dual mandate between MLAs and councillors and that this House has no say on whether an individual can have a dual mandate between being a Member of Parliament and holding another political office? That is for the House of Commons to determine. It was not until immediately before the most recent Westminster election, when pressure came from the press and others, that the Member and his party jumped on the issue and announced that they were ending that aspect of dual mandates. Would he not be better concentrating on the Bill before the House?

Mr Bell: I will concentrate on the minutes, and I will come to the Beggs-which-beggars-belief section of my speech in a minute.

The SDLP has had the spotlight shone on it today, and its Members have proven that they cannot be in two places at the same time. They were given the chance to say which one of them — either Margaret Ritchie or Mark Durkan — was going to step down. They said that Mark Durkan would step down, but they will not say Dr McDonnell, and they will not say Patricia Ritchie. They will not let their leader come forward, because they are going to continue to do two jobs.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Address your remarks through the Chair.

Mr Kennedy: Who is Patricia?

Mr Bell: Apologies. It is funny: when you do not see a Member that often, you can forget their name.

Mrs D Kelly: Will the Member give way?

Mr Bell: I will for you.

Mrs D Kelly: I thank the Member for giving way. It may be very amusing, but I believe that the Bill is about council and Assembly representation, as my party colleague said. I believe that the DUP is quite unique in the Chamber, because, as I understand it, it is the only party that has Members of Parliament who are also Members of the Assembly and councillors. Where is Gregory Campbell today? Answer that. What is the DUP going to do about Gregory and Sammy Wilson?

Mr Bell: I can only repeat what Gregory said: the process to deal with the issue is being put in place, and he will stand down. I ask the Member, if she would not tub-thump so much, to give me the commitment now that either Margaret Ritchie or Dr McDonnell will quit one of their two jobs. Can you do it? No, you cannot.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I think that it is time to go back to the Bill, please.

Mr Bell: The issue and import of the amendments is that a person cannot do two jobs. A person cannot be a councillor and a full-time representative.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. I ask all Members not to banter across the Chamber.

Mr Bell: We have to look at the history in Northern Ireland. Can people do two jobs? As someone said, it would beggar belief, or perhaps it would even “Begg” belief. Did we not have a Beggs who was in the House of Commons for a long time and who was also a councillor? Is he not still a councillor? Did we excise that little bit from our speech? Someone cannot be a double-jobber. The question is whether a person can be a councillor and hold a full-time job.
[Interruption.]

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. I ask Members either to refrain from bantering across the Chamber or to leave the Chamber.

Mr Bell: The question is whether a person can have a full-time job and be a councillor. When I worked in social services, the honourable Member for Upper Bann Mrs Kelly worked in occupational therapy. We both had full-time jobs, which were both paid for by the public purse, and we were both councillors. That was the reality for years.

If I can pick up some of the fine artwork that Mr Kinahan was trying to negotiate through, we are saying that a person can actually be in a full-time job that is paid for by the public purse and be a councillor, but they just cannot have a full-time job here. The logic of that will stand out. All my council colleagues, or the vast majority of them, have full-time jobs. Mr McCarthy will agree with me. The question is whether a position on a council is a full-time job. The reality is that it is not. It would be illegal for it to be a full-time job, because the salary of £9,000 a year is not compatible with the minimum wage. Let us not have any hypocrisy about those being full-time jobs. They are not, because it would be illegal under both domestic and European Law and because it would not fit the minimum wage. Therefore, that is the question that Members are going to have to answer.

I have looked at the amendments, and I ask the Member for East Belfast whether it is OK to be GP. The last time I looked at the position of GPs, they were, according to the BMA, doing two jobs. That is what their medical union told me. Some of them are on figures — I am not saying that the Member's party representative is one of them — of £100,000 a year plus. So you can be a GP on £100,000, or whatever it is, a year, do double the amount of hours, and be a councillor, but people come to this Chamber and tell other Members that they cannot work like that. Is it not for the electorate to decide?

We then had the intervention from Mr McFarland. I asked him a question, because he seemed a bit moralistic in suggesting that it was wrong to use a big hitter to help to bring somebody else in. I posed that question because rumour is rife in North Down that he will bring in the big hitter Sylvia Hermon to try to return him to the Assembly as an independent. If it is wrong to use big hitters, Mr McFarland, it is wrong to use them across the board. Let us not have a case of, "Do what I say, not what I do."

Mr McFarland: The problem is that if you run Edwin Poots, if you run Gregory Campbell, if you run Peter Robinson in East Belfast, where he brings two or three others in with him — *[Interruption.]* Sorry? The point that I am making is that if you run big hitters, bring people in with you, and then stand them down the next day, which I understand is the plan in the DUP, your electorate will not stand for being conned, because that is what it is. It is the same con that we had in 2007, when you promised your

electorate that never again would Sinn Féin be in Government, and never again would d'Hondt be used. The electorate will not be conned twice.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Return to the Bill, please.

Mr Bell: We will return to the Bill — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr Bell: The Bill is about doing jobs. The question of using big hitters was raised. I noticed that Mr McFarland did not say that he will not run as Lady Hermon's little independent.

However, the point is that someone can be a GP and work 80 hours, be a farmer, be a fine art dealer or a barrister. An SDLP Member can be a barrister. I do not wish to detain the Member because I understand that he has a selection meeting in North Belfast tonight. It will be interesting to see whether the electorate of North Belfast wish to allow him to be a barrister by day and an MLA by night, or vice versa.

Mr Givan: And a councillor.

Mr Bell: I do not think he is a councillor any more, to be fair —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. I asked the Member to return to the Bill.

Mr Bell: The issue is that the SDLP is telling us, "Do as I say, don't do what our party leader does". The SDLP does not want us to do what South Belfast does. It wants us to allow its Member in North Belfast to be a barrister and to draw a salary but give others lectures on everything. We are asked to allow the Ulster Unionists to sit with all their councillors, with none of them moving, yet give lectures. It is a case of, "Don't do as we do, but do as we are going to attempt to say". That is conning the electorate. That is not going to go down.

People then say that politicians have to go because the media tell them to. Unless I am badly mistaken, the 'Belfast Telegraph' had a double-page spread that pleaded with the Finance Minister to stay in the House to guide us through some of the most difficult financial circumstances Northern Ireland has ever seen.

Unlike the SDLP, I am not a cushion and do not bear the imprint of whoever from the media sat on me last. However, the reality is that a major newspaper is asking, in my view quite justifiably, given the leadership that has been shown, for the Finance Minister to guide us

through the current circumstances. Do we literally do what a particular newspaper tells us to or do we do what we believe to be right in the circumstances? That is the question. The other question is: do you let the people decide?

Let us go back to first principles. If the first principle is that you cannot be a councillor if you have a daytime job that is paid for by the public purse, we rule out nurses, physiotherapists, care assistants, doctors, GPs, etc. Let us be clear about what people are saying: if you are paid in your day job from the public purse —

7.30 pm

Mr McDevitt: That is an interesting analogy. However, to pursue the logic, the analogous position is that one cannot be a manager in a trust and a nurse on the ward at the same time. Our objective and that of the Bill is to prevent multiple mandates existing in the same professional body; that is, being a public representative, full time or part time. It is not possible, as I understand it, to hold several posts in an organisation in the professional world. It is not possible to be a member of the senior trust and a professional within that trust at a different grade. That is the analogy that Mr Bell might be well advised to follow, and that is the one that is relevant to the debate.

Mr Bell: I gave way in the hope that the Member for South Belfast would tell us something more about the senior Member for South Belfast, Dr McDonnell, who holds not only multiple mandates but perhaps also multiple jobs. Did he take the opportunity to do that? If I could advise my dear friend, not the mouth from south, to listen, he might actually need Mr McFarland's big hitter.

Mr McDevitt: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. As I said earlier, I understand that there is the cut and thrust of parliamentary democracy and all that. However, I think that we are all entitled to the respect of being addressed by our name and, if not by our name, by the name of our constituency but certainly not by hearsay, tittle-tattle or terms that some may choose to interpret as abusive.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I ask Members to respect others.

Mr Bell: I will do, and Mr McDevitt — “the mouth from South Belfast” is what I was saying — would possibly need the big hitter of Dr

McDonnell to carry him in. Is that why he will not come to the Chamber today and tell us why he will not —

Mr McGlone: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. The Member has just repeated the same form of address to my colleague Mr McDevitt. We all have a bit of parliamentary banter in the Chamber, and we all accept and live with it, but I expect Members to have a wee bit of respect for other Members and to address them properly by their name.

The Deputy Speaker: I remind all Members that we are quite a way into the debate on the Bill and we have yet to have the winding-up speech. I remind them to keep to the debate on the content of the Bill and to show respect to other Members when they address them.

Mr Bell: I did not realise that Members were so precious and sensitive.

The issue is one of genuine double-jobbing. The SDLP leader is going to do it, and she has told us that she will continue to do it. The honourable Member for South Belfast, Dr McDonnell, is going to do it, and he will continue to do it. Sinn Féin MPs claim their full allowances for the House of Commons, and I imagine that there is some link there that you have to do the job to take the allowances. So, they are going to do it. We have a full question mark here regarding the jobs. I understand the sensitivity involved.

Let me go back. I do not want the issue to be one of whether we have had a bit of banter across the Chamber, Mr McDevitt, backwards and forwards, a bit of healthy —

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

Mr Bell: It is not about whether Mr McDevitt and I have a bit of banter across the Chamber; the question is whether the Member for South Belfast is going to continue to do two jobs. The question is whether Members of this House will be allowed to take public money and do any job and be a councillor, or is it only in certain areas that they are not going to be allowed to do it? Will they be allowed to be a barrister who takes legal aid from the public purse and be an MLA as well, or is it only councillors that you are going to attack? The DUP has led the way and has shown what can be done with MPs. We have statistically outshone the rest altogether.

Mr Beggs: Does the Member realise that he is demonstrating one of the dangers of multiple mandates: arrogance?

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Members to switch off mobile phones. One is switched on at the moment and is interfering with the transmission system.

Mr Bell: I am always cautious about listening to anything on arrogance from a member of the Beggs family, given their expertise on the subject. I thought that the Member was going to tell us how it was possible for Daddy Beggs to be in the House of Commons as well as being a councillor. Perhaps he does not want to engage in that debate because —

A Member: He is a farmer as well.

Mr Bell: He is a farmer as well? Is that three mandates? Is that something that someone can do on —

Mr McGlone: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I am sure that all of us have been afforded latitude by other Members about the item under debate, but I have to say that Mr Bell has veered from virtually everything under the sun bar exactly what is and is supposed to be under discussion here today.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I have reminded most Members to return to the Bill. I will again remind Mr Bell to return to the Bill and to allow us to move to the winding-up speech.

Mr Bell: You know, when people are stung —

Mrs M Bradley: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I ask that you review Hansard tomorrow and look at the language that has been used against my colleague by Mr Bell and that, if it proves to be wrong, you ask him to withdraw it.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Speaker will review Hansard on all occasions in this situation.

Mr Bell: I am not sure — can it be clarified, Mr Deputy Speaker, what the language actually is?

Mr Deputy Speaker: At this point in time, I think we should continue the debate on the Bill.

Mr Bell: If members of the SDLP are so badly stung by having their double mandates pointed out, their taking of public money and everything else, they can tell me what it is, and I am quite happy to withdraw it.

Mrs D Kelly: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr Bell: I hope that these are not frivolous points of order, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mrs D Kelly: It is my understanding that this legislation deals with the dual mandate at local council and at Assembly level. Mr Bell is continually throwing in red herrings about dual mandates at Westminster and here in the Assembly.

Mr Bell: First, that was not a point of order, and, secondly, it is not a red herring to say that a Member can do a — *[Interruption.]* Perhaps we should have a point of order on shouting from a sedentary position.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. I ask the Member, finally, to return to the Bill; otherwise, I will ask him to resume his seat.

Mr Bell: The Bill —

Mr Poots: Will the Member give way?

Mr Bell: Yes.

Mr Poots: Does the Member not find it ironic today — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr Poots: You do not need to worry about me, Mr Deputy Speaker. I do not need to be wrapped up in cotton wool like some of the people opposite. Perhaps they need a bit more experience in the debating Chamber. Perhaps they need some more experience in the debating Chamber —

Mr Deputy Speaker: The point was about the Bill.

Mr Poots: My point is: is it not ironic that here we are tonight, at 19:37, debating why 108 people in Northern Ireland cannot participate at local government level? That excludes only 108 people, who, I believe, are sane — people have to be sane to stand for election in the first instance, and people have to be over a certain age. Exclusively those 108 people and no one else cannot stand in council elections in Northern Ireland; no one else in the public purse cannot stand for local council elections in Northern Ireland. People who sit in Westminster could still stand for local government; that excludes only 108 Assembly Members —

Ms Purvis: Will the Member give way?

Mr Poots: I cannot give way because Mr Bell was kind enough to give way to me. Members do not like the point that is being made, but does Mr Bell agree that it is ironic that 108 people can be excluded and others can practise whatever they happen to be engaged in — doctors, barristers or whatever else — but only 108 people in Northern Ireland cannot stand for council and no one else?

Mr Bell: I think that the honourable Member makes the point very well. It is a supreme point to —

Ms Purvis: Will the Member give way?

Mr Bell: Yes. Go ahead.

Ms Purvis: I just wish to clarify that the Bill does not preclude anyone from standing for local government. The clauses and the amendments to the Bill ensure that anyone can stand for both council and Assembly elections at the same time.

Mr Bell: If the Member was genuine and followed that through after a period of time, it does not allow that to be there.

Deputy Speaker, can I ask that, when you review Hansard, you review Mrs Kelly's remarks to another Member about needing to be locked up? I think that that is the most severe and abusive language that has been used in the House to date. Perhaps it is the case that the physician should heal herself.

Mr Poots: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. If it is correct that anyone did say that another Member should be locked up, I must say that people are largely locked up for terrorist or criminal activity or, indeed, because of insanity. Both those issues would preclude you from being a member of any elected institution; therefore, it is a very grave issue.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I make it clear that I will decide what are points of order and what are not. I remind Mr Bell to return to the Bill.

Mr Bell: The amendments would preclude people from being councillors, but they would preclude only 108 people out of a population of 1.7 million. The logic behind the amendments does not hold water because people can have 80-hour-a-week jobs and can be fully paid for by the public purse, but they cannot be councillors if they are MLAs. There is a complete illogicality in the amendments.

Mr B McCrea: I wonder what the Member's position was when appointments were sought for the Education and Skills Authority or the health and social care trusts. Legislation stated that MLAs could not sit on those bodies, and it gave reasons why they were not allowed to do so. I wonder whether that has any bearing on his thinking, because I am pretty sure that his party voted for that legislation.

Mr Bell: The primary bearing on my thinking is Basil McCrea, who cannot even attend one of every two council meetings that he was meant to attend. When he gets his house in order, I will correct him. I think that your attendance record is 46%, which is truly appalling.

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

Mr Bell: If a Member makes an intervention when he cannot even serve his constituents at one of every two council meetings, he would do better to look at his position than to look for the speck —

Mr Givan: I am grateful to the Member for giving way. Further to the point on which he elaborated, the Ulster Unionist Party Member for Lagan Valley, having attended only 16 meetings out of —

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Members that interventions also have to relate to the Bill.

Mr Givan: Thank you for your guidance, Mr Deputy Speaker. When speaking on the issue of being disqualified from a council, Mr Basil McCrea should reflect on his poor attendance record. He attended only 16 meetings, in comparison to Jonathan Craig, who attended 57. That is three and a half times more, but Mr McCrea drew the same salary from Lisburn City Council for his lack of attendance. Had he won the Ulster Unionist Party leadership contest, he would have had to sack himself for failing to do his job, just as he had threatened to sack his colleagues.

Mr Bell: On the amendments, the honourable Member takes the position —

Mr B McCrea: Will the Member give way?

Mr Bell: If the honourable Member has time, he would use it better by attending more than one in every two meetings of Lisburn City Council than by making frivolous interventions.

We have established the principle —

Mr B McCrea: Will the Member give way?

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

Mr Bell: I have always felt that the Ulster Unionists gave away enough.

We have established the principle that someone can be in a public job, do different jobs and take public money. The only thing that we are really talking about is excluding MLAs. The illogicality of that position will become clear as the debate becomes more mature and wiser. I do not support the Bill.

Ms Purvis: I appreciate the contributions to the Consideration Stage of the Bill, particularly those of the Members who addressed the amendments. I thank the Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment, Cathal Boylan, and the other Committee members for their consideration of the Bill. I acknowledge that Members were largely in agreement. Cathal Boylan talked about the expansion of women's representation, as did Alastair Ross. The Bill will not increase the representation of women, young people or any other under-represented group in politics, but it will open up opportunities for political parties to take on that responsibility. It will open up opportunities by creating vacancies in political parties to encourage more diverse political representation. That has to be recognised.

7.45 pm

Cathal Boylan also referred to the improvement in the public perception of and confidence in MLAs. Certainly, the examination and consideration that the Committee gave the Bill has improved and strengthened it. Mr Boylan talked about the conflict of interest, which goes to the heart of what Jonathan Bell and other Members referred to. The conflict of interest and the potential for conflict of interest occurs when one level of government makes policies and regulations that impact on another level of government. That is why transparency and accountability, which Chris Lyttle referred to, are, at heart, the principles of any democracy. They are the principles that we are trying to uphold. They are principles in the Bill, which is about removing the potential for that conflict of interest.

Alistair Ross said that fewer than 15 members of the public responded to the consultation.

I have to say that public outrage occurs as a whimper, not as a bang. Although only 15 members of the public responded to the consultation, four councils responded in favour of the Bill, and I have to say —

Mr Ross: Will the Member give way?

Ms Purvis: No.

The Member said that his party had taken the lead on ending dual mandates and had gone out of its way to end most of its dual mandates. That is because his party had most to begin with. I welcome the fact that he and his party have moved, but I wonder about their motivation. He talked about the media campaign, but I wonder about the motivation.

The Bill does not restrict people standing for election, but there seemed to a suggestion of wanting to block access and prevent people from standing. The DUP cannot have it both ways. This is not a resign-to-run Bill. It is not about preventing people aspiring to another or a higher level of office. It is open to everyone to stand for both. However, the Bill states that we cannot have both. There is nothing to prevent somebody standing for local government and the Assembly at the same time, winning both seats and then moving into the Assembly seat.

Danny Kinahan said that the Bill changed a stand-alone Act, and he, again, acknowledged that it was not a resign-to-run bill. He expressed concerns about having both elections on the same day and about the possibility of the public being duped by parties using co-option regulations to their own advantage. He is absolutely right. Unfortunately, the alternative is to block access by inserting a resign-to-run clause, which I know the Member would oppose.

I welcome the Ulster Unionists' opposition to amendment No 2. Delaying disqualification would mean that a Member could draw two salaries, two sets of expenses and everything else along with that. Mr Kinahan said that an MLA's position was full time and that a councillor's was more than part time and questioned an MLA's ability to do both jobs.

I thank Patsy McGlone for his kind words in the debate, particularly in relation to widening access and trying to create a more diverse representation. He paid tribute to the experience gained at local council level. He addressed the fact that this is about the people;

it is about those who find themselves in difficult circumstances at this time. He said that there were moles in all our eyes when it came to dual mandates and that it is up to political parties to select candidates for office for the most laudable reasons. Again, Mr McGlone referred to the potential conflict of interest caused by policy and legislation being made in this place for another level of government.

I ask the SDLP to reconsider its support for amendment No 2. It would complicate the Bill and delay the use of co-option regulations, whereas amendment No 1 would allow a reasonable time — 48 days under electoral law and up to five weeks under co-option regulations — for parties to nominate.

I was confused by Mr Farry's contribution. He just wanted to hit every button, and he did not address many of the amendments. He said that the whole Bill was flawed, and he concentrated on dual mandates of Members of Parliament and Members of the Assembly, which is a reserved matter that the Bill cannot address. He said that council membership is a part-time job; however, that is a smoke screen. He missed the point about dual mandates: it is not appropriate for decision-making powers to be concentrated in the hands of a few. In fact, one of his councillor colleagues, who made a submission during public consultation on the Bill, said as much. An Alliance councillor was in favour of the Bill because he wanted an end to Assembly Members being councillors, as it interfered with council business. Mr Farry's contribution contradicted his party colleague's contribution to the consultation on the Bill.

Mr Farry also talked about the possibility of three elections being held on the same day. However, I repeat: the Assembly cannot legislate for another place. The Bill is to end dual mandates between councils and the Assembly; it is not to prevent candidates from standing, but it will prevent them continuing to hold more than one office. If parties want to approach the Bill opportunistically, including running big hitters, no one can prevent them.

Paul Girvan said again — I acknowledge the fact that the DUP has taken action — that being an MP and being an MLA are full-time jobs. That being the case, I wonder how one could possibly take on another job, particularly another elected position. One is either in favour of ending dual

mandates or one is not. Mr Girvan preferred to have a go at the Ulster Unionists and others —

Mr Givan: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker, is it right for the Member to refer to an individual who has not been here for the debate?

Ms Purvis: I beg your pardon, Mr Deputy Speaker. I was referring to Mr Givan, not Mr Girvan. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. The Member has the Floor.

Ms Purvis: Mr Givan preferred to have a go at the Ulster Unionists and others. He obviously spent more time studying the Register of Members' Interests than the Bill. I refer him to Mr McGlone's remarks about all of us having moles in our eyes. He then referred, as did his colleague Jonathan Bell, to double-jobbing, as opposed to dual mandates, and went on to say, wrongly, that a Member's voting record is an indication of whether they are doing their job. He missed the point of the legislation: it is not about whether someone can do one or two jobs; it is about whether it is appropriate to hold more than one elected office. It is clearly not appropriate. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. I established earlier that I would not allow banter across the Floor, yet we have had quite a bit of it. The Member who proposed the motion should have the Floor.

Ms Purvis: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. In supporting the Bill, Alex Maskey said that it is timely and appropriate. He said that he was not taking a high moral approach, that our society is in transition and that all parties are committed to ending dual mandates. Furthermore, he paid tribute to the moves that the DUP has made. Sinn Féin wants to end dual mandates, particularly between Members of Parliament and MLAs, and it will work towards that end, including making announcements in the coming days that will affect current MLAs who are councillors, in order to make way for a younger membership.

Roy Beggs said that the Bill can assist by widening access and sharing the responsibility for governing. He supports the Bill because it acts in the community interest, not self-interest. He referred to the principles governing public life and said that it is much better for Members to commit to a single role. He acknowledged that

the amendments improve the Bill and that the Bill does not prevent anyone from standing for both elections. He said that it allows councillors who aspire to election to the Assembly to do so. However, the system is open to abuse, and Mr Beggs said that he hoped that the public will watch how co-option regulations are used. He opposed amendment No 2 because there is no need for a 60-day period before disqualification takes place.

Peter Weir moved amendment No 2 on behalf of the Committee for the Environment. He said that it ensures that disqualification does not take place until 60 days have passed. I intervened at that point to say that it also pushes the co-option regulations to the end of that period. It would do so in the case of the disqualification clause; however, that is not to say that a newly elected councillor cannot resign during the 60-day period, after which the co-option regulations would apply for a 28-day period.

Mr Weir said that the Bill was anti-democratic. I disagree: electors choose their elected representatives from a ballot paper; they do not choose the candidates. The Bill is, therefore, not anti-democratic. It sets out the standards that we want for our democracy: one person elected to one level of government, particularly as more powers are devolved to local government. The review of public administration was referred to in that context. Legislation is progressing through the Assembly that will make moves to devolve power on housing and other functions to local government.

Mr Weir's party has moved to end dual mandates among its members, so it is obvious that it believes that it is inappropriate to hold two elected offices. In fact, it was interesting that the amendment that Mr Weir tried to table was intended to change the Bill's commencement date. I am sure that other Members are as confused as I am about why the DUP opposes the Bill when it only wanted to change the date of commencement.

Chris Lyttle said that we should establish sound democratic principles of transparency and accountability. I agree absolutely. Dual mandates are an issue. However, I have to say to Mr Lyttle that the public does not distinguish between dual mandates, whether the individual concerned is a councillor and an MLA or an MP and an MLA. I agree with him that diversity in our political representation is the best way of

delivering better government. He said that the job of councillor is a part-time position only to contradict himself by saying that being a political representative is a 24/7 job. It is either part-time or it is not.

Alan McFarland was very impressive. He said that the issue has bobbed around the Assembly for a very long time, that the uncertainty around the issue has been caused by instability and that it is politically unhealthy to have a stagnant political class. He said that double-jobbing bed-blocks political progress, preventing young people, women and others coming through and getting involved. He also said that the issue of experience is a nonsense argument, and he talked about the impact of dual mandates and how, in particular, they interfere with the work of Committees.

Jonathan Bell said that people cannot do two full-time jobs. I agree. However, this House cannot legislate to end dual mandates between MLAs and MPs. If it could, we would probably be considering such a Bill right now. The Bill is not about anyone's ability to do two jobs; it is about whether it is appropriate to hold two elected offices at the same time while collecting multiple remuneration from the public purse.

8.00 pm

It is about the potential conflict of interest when one level of government makes policy and legislation that affects another. This Bill removes that conflict of interest.

The purpose of this Assembly is to offer the best possible form of democracy and governance to the people of Northern Ireland, not the most convenient form for political parties. We are trying to establish and create a permanent institution that is responsive to and wholly owned by the people of Northern Ireland. Those institutions and their processes are permanent. We, the politicians, are the ones who are transient.

In Northern Ireland — I make no regret about referring to it again — almost 60,000 people are seeking employment in some form, including highly skilled and experienced individuals whose careers and lives have been interrupted by the economic downturn. It also includes recent graduates and young people who are unable to start work because there is none out there. Whether they are experienced or just starting out, there is clearly a large pool of individuals

who are looking to make a contribution to our society and who could bring a fresh perspective to our politics. Many of them would make excellent local councillors and Assembly Members, whether the council positions are full time or part time. Therefore, I do not buy the argument that there are not enough people to fill all the vacancies that would be created by an end to dual mandates.

Finally, I find it difficult to understand how any political party can justify the continued existence of multiple mandates in any form during the current economic environment. What kind of leadership are we offering to the growing numbers of unemployed members of our society who want one paid position only, when some of us insist on protecting our right to multiple levels of remuneration from the public purse? That is all it is: protecting our own interests. There is absolutely no compelling argument in the public interest for retaining dual mandates. None. Therefore, it is absolutely the right time for this legislation, and my amendments make it stronger and more flexible to deal with the variety of political situations. Whether the review of public administration is brought in next year or not, there is no compelling reason for Members of this Chamber to have access to an additional part-time job and part-time salary at expense to the public purse. It is time that we made a strong statement to the people of Northern Ireland that we are connected to their lives, needs and desire for a responsive Government that set the highest standard for how they function and how they run.

I commend the legislation and the amendments to the House and, respectfully, request the support of my colleagues. Before I close, I again thank the Committee for its constructive engagement on the Bill, and I thank my own staff, Shannon O'Connell and the staff in the Bill Office, particularly Eilis Haughey, who have offered exceptional professional services throughout the development of the Bill.

Question put, That amendment No 1 be made.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 41; Noes 31.

AYES

Ms M Anderson, Mr Armstrong, Mr Beggs, Mr Boylan, Mr D Bradley, Mrs M Bradley, Mr P J Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Burns, Mr Butler, Mr W Clarke, Mr Cobain, Rev Dr Robert Coulter, Mr Cree, Mr Elliott, Sir Reg Empey, Mr Gardiner,

Ms Gildernew, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mr Leonard, Mr McCallister, Mr McCartney, Mr McClarty, Mr B McCrea, Mr McDevitt, Mr McFarland, Mr McGimpsey, Mr McGlone, Mr McNarry, Mr Murphy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr O'Dowd, Mr O'Loan, Mrs O'Neill, Ms Purvis, Mr K Robinson, Ms Ruane, Mr Savage.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Beggs and Mr P J Bradley.

NOES

Mr S Anderson, Lord Bannside, Mr Bell, Lord Browne, Mr Buchanan, Mr T Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Easton, Mr Ford, Mr Frew, Mr Gibson, Mr Givan, Mr Hamilton, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Ms Lo, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Miss McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Newton, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr B Wilson.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Buchanan and Mr McCarthy.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Amendment No 2 proposed: In page 1, line 5, at end insert

"(2) The disqualification in subsection (1) shall take effect at the end of 60 days after a person takes his or her seat as a member of the Assembly." — [Mr Weir.]

Question put.

Mr Deputy Speaker: There has been a fault in the system, so we will have to rerun the vote. I ask the Tellers to come forward again.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 39; Noes 33.

AYES

Mr S Anderson, Lord Bannside, Mr Bell, Mr D Bradley, Mrs M Bradley, Mr P J Bradley, Lord Browne, Mr Buchanan, Mr Burns, Mr T Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Easton, Mr Ford, Mr Frew, Mr Gibson, Mr Givan, Mr Hamilton, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mrs D Kelly, Ms Lo, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr McDevitt, Mr McGlone, Miss McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Newton, Mr O'Loan, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr B Wilson.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr P J Bradley and Mr Buchanan.

NOES

Ms M Anderson, Mr Armstrong, Mr Beggs,
Mr Boylan, Mr Brady, Mr Butler, Mr W Clarke,
Mr Cobain, Rev Dr Robert Coulter, Mr Cree,
Mr Elliott, Sir Reg Empey, Mr Gardiner,
Ms Gildernew, Mr G Kelly, Mr Kennedy,
Mr Kinahan, Mr Leonard, Mr McCallister,
Mr McCartney, Mr McClarty, Mr B McCrea,
Mr McFarland, Mr McGimpsey, Mr McNarry,
Mr Murphy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill,
Ms Purvis, Mr K Robinson, Ms Ruane, Mr Savage.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Beggs and Mr Kinahan.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Question put, That the clause, as amended, stand part of the Bill.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 41; Noes 31.

AYES

Ms M Anderson, Mr Armstrong, Mr Beggs,
Mr Boylan, Mr D Bradley, Mrs M Bradley,
Mr P J Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Burns, Mr Butler,
Mr W Clarke, Mr Cobain, Rev Dr Robert Coulter,
Mr Cree, Mr Elliott, Sir Reg Empey, Mr Gardiner,
Ms Gildernew, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly,
Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mr Leonard,
Mr McCallister, Mr McCartney, Mr McClarty,
Mr B McCrea, Mr McDevitt, Mr McFarland,
Mr McGimpsey, Mr McGlone, Mr McNarry,
Mr Murphy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr O'Dowd, Mr O'Loan,
Mrs O'Neill, Ms Purvis, Mr K Robinson, Ms Ruane,
Mr Savage.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Beggs and Mr W Clarke.

NOES

Mr S Anderson, Lord Bannside, Mr Bell,
Lord Browne, Mr Buchanan, Mr T Clarke,
Mr Craig, Mr Easton, Mr Ford, Mr Frew, Mr Gibson,
Mr Givan, Mr Hamilton, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin,
Ms Lo, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCausland,
Mr I McCrea, Miss McIlveen, Mr McQuillan,
Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Newton, Mr Poots,
Mr G Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Storey, Mr Weir,
Mr B Wilson.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Buchanan and
Mr McCarthy.

Question accordingly agreed to.

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

Clause 2 (Commencement)

Amendment No 3 made: Leave out clause 2 and insert

"Commencement

2. Section 1 comes into operation on the day of the first local general election to take place after Royal Assent." — [Ms Purvis.]

Question put, That the clause, as amended, stand part of the Bill.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 41; Noes 31.

AYES

Ms M Anderson, Mr Armstrong, Mr Beggs,
Mr Boylan, Mr D Bradley, Mrs M Bradley,
Mr P J Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Burns, Mr Butler,
Mr W Clarke, Mr Cobain, Rev Dr Robert Coulter,
Mr Cree, Mr Elliott, Sir Reg Empey, Mr Gardiner,
Ms Gildernew, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly,
Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mr Leonard,
Mr McCallister, Mr McCartney, Mr McClarty,
Mr B McCrea, Mr McDevitt, Mr McFarland,
Mr McGimpsey, Mr McGlone, Mr McNarry,
Mr Murphy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr O'Dowd, Mr O'Loan,
Mrs O'Neill, Ms Purvis, Mr K Robinson, Ms Ruane,
Mr Savage.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Beggs and Mr Burns.

NOES

Mr S Anderson, Lord Bannside, Mr Bell,
Lord Browne, Mr Buchanan, Mr T Clarke,
Mr Craig, Mr Easton, Mr Ford, Mr Frew, Mr Gibson,
Mr Givan, Mr Hamilton, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin,
Ms Lo, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCausland,
Mr I McCrea, Miss McIlveen, Mr McQuillan,
Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Newton, Mr Poots,
Mr G Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Storey, Mr Weir,
Mr B Wilson.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Buchanan and Mr McCarthy.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Clause 2, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

New Clause

Amendment No 4 made: After clause 2, insert the following new clause

"Interpretation

2A. In this Act—

'Councillor' and 'Local government' have the same meaning as in the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 1972;

'Local general election' has the same meaning as in the Electoral Law Act (Northern Ireland) 1962."
— [Ms Purvis.]

New clause ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 3 (Short Title)

Mr Deputy Speaker: Amendment No 5 is consequential to amendment No 1.

Amendment No 5 made: In page 1, line 11, leave out "(Amendment)". — [Ms Purvis.]

Clause 3, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Long title

Mr Deputy Speaker: Amendment Nos 6 and 7 are consequential to amendment No 1.

Amendment No 6 made: Leave out

"Amend the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 1972 to". — [Ms Purvis.]

Amendment No 7 made: Leave out "being elected, or being," and insert "being". — [Ms Purvis.]

Long title, as amended, agreed to.

Mr Deputy Speaker: That concludes the Consideration Stage of the Local Government (Disqualification) (Amendment) Bill. The Bill stands referred to the Speaker.

I ask Members to take their ease for a few moments.

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

9.00 pm

Private Members' Business

Armed Forces and Veterans Bill: Second Stage

Mr Deputy Speaker: Will Members please resume their seats?

Mr McNarry: I beg to move

That the Second Stage of the Armed Forces and Veterans Bill [NIA 33/09] be agreed.

I introduce this stage of the Bill slightly heavy hearted in the news that I am sure has reached many Members today. The sad news I have heard is of the passing of an old soldier, Captain Austin Ardill MC, a good unionist and a member of this auspicious institution when it was a Parliament. It seems apt that I present my Bill on armed forces, veterans and their families.

I listened intently to the Government when their Prime Minister, then the Rt Hon Gordon Brown MP, said, in July 2008:

"Our Armed Forces are second to none. The demands that we impose on them in the course of their duty are unique. These obligations set them apart from others who serve and protect society. Their hardships are also felt by their families, and by many veterans too. I am determined to ensure that they are fairly treated."

He added:

"The nation has a commitment to our Service personnel, their families and veterans. This requires us to ensure that the unusual demands of serving in the Armed Forces do not result in unfairness for those who serve and to recognise the special sacrifice made by some members of the Armed Forces and their families."

Tonight, with the support of my colleagues in the Assembly, I trust that we can add not just our support but our willingness to include Northern Ireland in matching and doing its bit for the armed forces, their families and veterans. As things stand, we are excluded to the extent that the commitment already given in England, Wales and in Scotland has not yet registered in Northern Ireland. I can see no reason why not. Therefore, that is the genuine and honest

purpose of my Bill, and I request my colleagues to lend their support to its adoption.

I have taken my lead from the Government Command Paper 7424, 'The Nation's Commitment: Cross-Government Support to Our Armed Forces, Their Families and Veterans', from July 2008. That document highlights the continuity of public services. Service personnel and their dependents must receive continuity of public services wherever they are based and whenever they are obliged to move so as to mitigate the risk of repeated disadvantages in relation to others.

As a proper return for sacrifice, service personnel and their dependants must receive the treatment and welfare support that they need for as long as they need it to mitigate the conditions that limit how they live their lives and the terrible physical and mental injuries. The Government and the devolved Administrations, where appropriate, should take account of the impact on the sizeable armed forces constituency and the strategic effect on the armed forces when making policy or considering legislative proposals.

The demands of service in the armed forces are unique, including the absolute requirement to follow orders regardless of danger, and to accept risks of harm without question. Such obligations on the armed forces set them apart from all others who serve and protect our society. A mutually supporting relationship among service people, the Government and the community is considered vital to maintaining the delivery of the services that I have described.

I understand, too, that there is increasing concern in the armed forces and in the Government that that complementary relationship is breaking down. As regards the relationship with people and society, personal knowledge of the armed forces is diminishing. Aspirations and expectations are rising, and it is increasingly difficult to recruit and retain personnel. The armed forces operate beyond the level of military commitments that were planned. It is increasingly difficult to reconcile life in the armed forces with expectations of a normal life.

My Bill seeks to take account of those commitments. Therefore, the proposals that relate to devolved matters include prosthetic limb provision; access to NHS dentistry; the health needs of veterans; getting onto the

NHS waiting list; the roll-out of community mental health; affordable homes; adapted social housing; adapted affordable homes; disabled facilities; affordable homes that extend access for veterans; social housing with local connections; a certificate of cessation; homelessness; school place allocation; educational attainment; special educational needs; education and training for service leavers; basic skills for families; concessionary bus travel; blue badge access; childcare provision; flexible careers in the armed forces; support to the volunteer reserve forces; support to the employment of service families; and the employment of service leavers in the public sector. They lose out on all of that, which is so important to the families.

For a moment, I will reflect on America's strategy, which I am sure Members will be interested in. The GI Bill of Rights was introduced to the USA as the Serviceman's Readjustment Act of 1944. Since then, it has been updated in line with the needs and circumstances of the armed forces. The latest addition is the Veterans' Benefits Improvement Act of 2008. The GI Bill covers a host of benefits for veterans, service members and some dependants of disabled or deceased veterans who wish to pursue an education.

In the United States, current benefits include monthly compensations to those who are 10% disabled as a result of military service; a monthly pension to those who are disabled by war; free healthcare for those whose conditions are combat-related since 11 November 1998; vocational rehabilitation and employment; benefits to eligible veterans while in an approved training scheme; home loans; life insurance; and dependency and indemnity compensation, which is payable to certain survivors of servicemen who happen to die on active duty. America has responded to the needs and rights of its servicemen and women. So, too, have England, Scotland and Wales. Now, it is our turn.

I seek to address those in our community who may think in the negative regarding our fellow citizens and, indeed, those from across the border who have chosen to wear a uniform and serve to bring democracy to other places. The Bill is about their children. It is also about fathers, husbands, mothers, wives, brothers, sisters, uncles and aunts who, irrespective of religion, race or creed, are in a career that they

chose because it is what they wanted to do. Those people are supported by their families. Due to the uniqueness of their employment, they are away from their families, often for long periods of time. They are people from your community and my community, as well as people who come here to settle for short periods and are, unfortunately, disadvantaged unfairly. My Bill does not give them an advantage or create new benefits for members of the armed forces and their families. I have heard much in the Assembly about rights and equality, and justified it is, too. Well, then, how can anyone who takes that line deny access to the same rights to the forces, their families and the veterans?

My Bill does not have major cost consequences. It does not ask for more, only for the same, irrespective of whether a person wears a uniform or belongs to someone who does. My Bill identifies a gap that needs to be closed to enable members of the forces to have equal opportunities and, in a sense, prevent the current possibility of local services, hospitals, schools and dentists, for instance, being made more difficult to access for their wives, husbands, partners and children.

As I said, I have heard much about rights and equality. I also hear and, because I know most Members who share the Assembly with me, I know it to be true, that Members express genuine concerns over people not getting the fairness that we believe they deserve. My Bill rectifies all of that for the armed services and puts a stop to children, in particular, being disadvantaged and made unequal. The Bill is an exercise in fairness and equality. It extends rights, which are available elsewhere in the United Kingdom, to former and serving members of the armed forces and their families in Northern Ireland. It has an important job to do in a businesslike, no-nonsense way.

The Bill will also be seen by many observers as a test of the genuineness of the commitment to equality professed so often by Members of the Assembly. This is a Bill with genuine and open intent. There are no hidden agendas, but simply a desire to extend rights that are already enjoyed elsewhere in our country. I ask Members to reflect on that and to give the Bill fair passage, because it is concerned with equality and rights and with decent treatment of individuals. There is no political subtext. There has never been a time in which the public have been more aware of the sheer professionalism

and dedication of our armed forces, often in the face of official neglect, often in the face of systematic and scandalous underfunding and under-equipping in the most dangerous of circumstances.

The Armed Forces and Veterans Bill is a legal charter for our armed services personnel. It will press. It will press Stormont Departments to make sure that soldiers, their families and veterans are not disadvantaged because of their military service. It will extend rights that are available to armed services personnel and their families in all other parts of the United Kingdom. I have had a tremendous response to the Bill from serving personnel and veterans, who told me, "Tell the Assembly there is a need for improvements for us." In correspondence, a former member of the armed forces stated:

"The system is deliberately designed to frustrate, cause additional stress and, ultimately, hope that you will go away."

Another person who contacted us stated:

"I suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, and, in the 21 years since my injury, I have never been offered as much as one session."

He went on to say:

"Maybe, it's because I just try and get on with things and because I may joke and have a laugh to keep positive".

Then he said:

"But it is not like that all the time. I have not had a full night's sleep in 21 years, and I refuse to dose myself with antidepressants."

Those are just two examples of the many from real people who have suffered because they chose to serve our community and got injured.

The main areas of concern on the ground affecting the people I am talking about include housing; debt; recognition of service-related conditions, such as post-traumatic stress disorder; and benefit entitlement. My Bill will go further in bringing to the table here in Northern Ireland what is no different to anywhere else, because it contains an extension of the National Health Service priority treatment commitment to any services veteran suffering as a result of their service, and not just those entitled to a war pension.

It is estimated that 5,000 armed forces personnel are stationed in Northern Ireland.

Add to that volunteer or reserve forces and the immediate families of serving personnel, and we see that a sizeable military constituency is living here with us in Northern Ireland. Living in another part of the United Kingdom, they have an absolute right to expect the same level of provision that is available to them elsewhere.

9.15 pm

Service life makes demands on servicemen and their families that are simply not evident in normal civilian life: postings, movement and the associated disruption. School relocation, registering with medical practices and the availability of care are realities for those in service life that my Bill seeks to address. The commitments that will make a difference cover virtually all Departments. Issues include: veterans' normal healthcare; children's visits to the dentist; providing prosthetic limbs to injured personnel; reminding landlords about the priority of catering for seriously injured personnel in adapted social housing; ensuring that special educational needs for service children are uninterrupted when they are posted to Northern Ireland; and giving service leavers the opportunity to be accommodated should they wish to progress to higher levels of education.

All of those are outworkings of practical ways in which the Bill will copper-fasten a system of rights and entitlements that is necessary to make the lives of service personnel less disrupted, less fractured and more tolerable, despite the demands that are put on them. Consequently, the Bill will provide an implementation framework that confers duties on a range of public authorities and Departments, particularly the Department of Finance and Personnel.

The Bill will ensure that national provisions which relate to matters that are devolved should now apply in Northern Ireland. The objective is to provide service personnel with as much lifestyle choice as any other citizen enjoys. Despite the unique demands of their profession, service people and their families surely have to be enabled to manage their lives as effortlessly as anyone else and be offered real and sustainable choice to attain their own balance between the demands of military life, personal development, service mobility and family stability. Furthermore, wherever they are based, service personnel and their dependants must receive continuity in public services,

and, when they are obliged to move, the risk of repeated disadvantage compared to others must be mitigated.

A proper return for sacrifice is another concept that underpins the Bill. Service personnel and their dependants must receive the treatment and welfare support that they need for as long as they need it. In militating against their having to accept conditions that limit how they live their lives, often having to accept and cope with terrible physical and mental injuries, we should remember that the armed forces constituency matters. When making policy and when considering legislation, we need to take account of the impact of the sizable armed forces constituency and of the strategic effect of those policies on it. For example, rural-proofing must militate against systematic disadvantage being imposed on armed services personnel and their families.

Proposals relating to devolved matters include health matters, such as the standard of prosthetic limbs provided to injured personnel by the Defence Medical Services. That provision should be matched by the NHS here. Service mobility results in the frequent need to find an NHS dentist. That is nothing to us; it is not difficult for our families, but it is very difficult when you have been posted to a new location. Consequently, access to dentistry can be difficult for service families. Health planning must take account of sizable service populations, which often have specific needs that are not present in the general population.

More must be done to assess the healthcare needs of veterans and to raise awareness of that among healthcare professionals. When patients move across the United Kingdom, for example, previous waiting times should be taken into account, with the expectation that treatment will take place within the national waiting time standards. As with any person who moves between hospitals in the United Kingdom, service members and their families should be treated as quickly as possible in the order of clinical priority. Pilot schemes for community mental health services for veterans have already been set up in six locations across Great Britain, concentrating on improving veterans' access to mental health services. Here in Northern Ireland, that commitment is met by the Royal Irish Aftercare Service.

As far as housing is concerned, there are linked issues of access to affordable homes; the

availability of shared equity schemes, adapted social housing and homes for seriously injured personnel; access to key worker schemes for at least 12 months after discharge; and the waiving of having a local connection or residence for consideration on social housing waiting lists. It is also important that housing grants for adaptation of homes up to £30,000 in value are not reduced by the application of a means test that takes account of any compensation received from the armed forces compensation scheme or war pension scheme. That, most certainly, should be the case for the seriously injured and disabled people that we have in our midst. Certificates of cessation of military service, which are available up to six months before ceasing service, should be accepted by the Housing Executive and housing bodies as evidence of impending homelessness, without any further requirement of proof. Those people are leaving the Army; they do not have a home. Why do they need to be subject to all that paperwork? There should also be an exploration of the creation of ex-service housing associations. There are now many ex-service personnel who love life in Northern Ireland and want to settle here.

On the education front, access to schools is often more difficult for service children because of short-notice postings. We need to examine whether there is any disadvantage to service families in our system at present, and, if there is, we need to set about removing it. We also need to establish whether there is an educational disadvantage in belonging to a service family. We should seek the help of the devolved Administrations in Scotland and Wales, who are looking at that matter and are far further down the line than we are.

That would equally apply to the way in which we handle special education needs. A child that has special education needs is nothing other than a child. Are we ever to judge that, because a child's father or mother wears a uniform, that child is to be disadvantaged? I think not. Special education needs statementing should be continuous and seamless, even if the subject is moved from one part of the country to another. Is that too much to ask? That, again, implies greater contact and uniformity of practice between the devolved Administrations.

All service leavers with over six years' service will have an opportunity in England, Scotland and Wales to achieve their first level 3

qualification or A level or vocational equivalent free from tuition fees. I know that the Minister from my party spoke on that topic today, but let me say this: we should, as far as possible, fund access to routes for first foundation or full degrees. The Scottish Ministers and the Welsh Assembly Government have agreed to put those measures in place, and I am asking for uniformity. The same should apply to basic skills training and entitlements. On the transport front, by 1 April 2001, the statutory bus concession in England will be extended to include service personnel and veterans under the age of 60. What is really being said here is that this is our community.

The armed services, their veterans and their families are part of our community, even to the extent that they deserve a statutory bus concession. That is what happens in England, and the concession extends to veterans under the age of 60 who were seriously injured in service and who are currently, under the law, residents in England and Wales. Scotland is looking at similar measures. In other words, someone who has been seriously injured should, surely to goodness, be entitled to some form of free transport to get him or her about the place. The Government are introducing a scheme so that severely disabled veterans in England will receive automatic entitlement to a blue badge without further assessment.

Finally, we need to examine and match, as far as possible, the childcare provision that exists in Scotland and Wales. That is why the Bill, by pressing the devolved Government, namely us, and our agencies to take account of ex-service families in the planning process will help to avoid what could amount to — I am being careful in what I say — passive discrimination against service families. I am sure that that is not the intention. In the many and varied ways that I outlined, the Bill seeks to redress that wrong. Even if it is a passive wrong, active legislation is required to right it.

As I stated at the outset, the Bill is not intended to divide the House. I want people to reflect on the fact that those people are individuals and families who, like you and me, get up every day to do a job that benefits society. I also want Members to reflect on the fact that, between 2005 and 2006 — we must embrace this — 3% of recruits who entered the military through recruitment centres in Northern Ireland came from the Republic. By 2008, that figure stood at

14% and is still growing. The Bill will help people from both sides of the border who have chosen a career in the British armed forces. It will help their families and the families who reside in Northern Ireland. I commend the Bill to the Assembly and ask for Members' total support.

Mr Bell: I preface my remarks by joining Mr McNarry in expressing our sorrow on learning of the death of Captain Austin Ardill. Those of us who had the privilege of knowing Captain Ardill knew him as an honourable man who was distinguished in his duty and devoted to his country. He was a man for whom integrity was second nature. It is a major loss, and we join Mr McNarry in saluting a true unionist and a true patriot.

The Bill, which has been so well and comprehensively put forward, speaks for itself. Recently, I had contact with a constituent who served in Afghanistan and who, his father told me, had a helmet-mounted camera through which it is possible to watch the action. I saw the sheer bravery of those men under fire in Afghanistan, and I saw how regularly they risk their lives.

Tonight's debate is not about whether certain aspects of conflict are right; it is about what happens when we send our men and women into conflict. My understanding is that there is a military contract. We have a volunteer army; nobody is forced or conscripted. Devoted men and women are prepared to use their skills, abilities, athleticism and intelligence for the benefit of their country, and, as the Bible says, they are prepared to offer the greater love that no man has than to:

"lay down his life for his friends."

9.30 pm

So often, when people are injured and servicemen and servicewomen are caught in conflict, we hear about it on the news for a day, and it passes on. However, the injuries that they sustain and the post-traumatic stress and disorder that they live with goes on for those men and women, often for a lifetime. It is only proportionate, reasonable and fair that, in health, education and housing, the provision of psychology, mental health and psychiatry services, and with adaptations and medical and physical provision, we offer to those men and women the same that we would expect for

ourselves. In fact, is it not more of crying shame that the current system has not done that?

The Army includes people from all backgrounds, colours, races and creeds, and it has a distinguished history. Therefore, all in the House will stand united in saying to the men and women who are prepared to risk their lives for us that, in the course of their duty to their country, their country will stand by them at their time of need. Nowhere is that more specifically put than, as Mr McNarry stated, in the issue of the children of armed forces' personnel because, by the very nature of the job, they are frequently disrupted. They experience changes of address, of educational placement and of relationships with their school friends, with their peer group outside school and with their sporting organisations. In many cases, they experience severe dislocation from family members.

Given all that they and their families are prepared to sacrifice for what is, undoubtedly, the greater good, it is only right that, when the time comes for us to seek to provide those provisions and ameliorate their experiences, we do so with the best that we can offer to each of our citizens. Where we recognise a difficulty to do with transport, dislocation from family or the need for a seamless service in special educational needs, about which Mr McNarry spoke so eloquently some moments ago, it is only fair and appropriate that we offer that service at the point of need.

The argument has been well made, and, therefore, it does not need any form of underlining, exaggeration or anything else. I do not want anyone to think that the shortness of my speech means that we are not giving the matter due justice. There is no point in repeating what we already agree on and what has been so well laid out. I join in a plea for the whole House to support the Bill fully.

Mr Brady: I oppose the Bill, but, at the outset, I wish to say that I come from a family who had many veterans on my maternal side. They were people who were members of the British Army, Navy and Air Force from the Boer War to the Korean War, and, indeed, my father-in-law, who lives with us, is an RAF veteran. He was in China, Germany and Britain. In case anyone is wondering why I oppose the Bill, I do so on an equality issue. Mr McNarry mentioned equality a couple of times, and he covered many areas. I

will concentrate on the issues concerning health and provision in the Health Service.

In August 2009, the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) launched a document about delivering healthcare to the armed forces. It is a protocol for ensuring equitable access to health and social care services. It states that it is intended to ensure that:

"members of the Armed Forces, their families and veterans are not disadvantaged when seeking to access health and social care services."

However, surely no one should be disadvantaged in seeking to access those services. Would the Bill mean that, of two people who arrived at Daisy Hill Hospital in Newry suffering from the same ailment at the same time, one would get priority because he or she was a veteran? That is a question that possibly needs to be answered.

Apparently, having to move frequently is a problem for members of the armed forces, but that can also be a problem for non-military personnel, particularly when it comes to employment.

In answer to a question from John McCallister in 2008, the Health Minister said:

"Our Health Service treats all patients on the basis of clinical priority rather than any personal or social circumstance." — [Official Report, Bound Volume 29, WA73-4, col 2].

A veteran is defined as anyone who has served for at least one day in the armed forces, whether regular or reserve. It seems that the Bill is designed to create a two-tier system in the Health Service, which is surely there to provide access to healthcare provision for all at the point of need.

In August 2010, Mr McNarry described his Bill as a:

"legal charter for our armed services personnel".

He said that it would compel Stormont Departments to:

"make sure soldiers, their families and veterans are not disadvantaged"

because of their military service. However, I think that there is a difference between being disadvantaged and receiving priority status. No

one should be disadvantaged in the provision of healthcare for whatever reason.

John Davis of the veterans advisory and pensions committee has said that veterans here are better off than those in GB in many ways because of various additional support bodies. When talking about the healthcare service, Mr Davies said:

"With the waiting lists and staff shortages, it's difficult for the medical profession to make significant changes for the benefit of veterans."

A spokesperson for the Health Department has said that the launch of the protocol between the Health Service and the Ministry of Defence (MOD) was to ensure that members of the armed forces, their families and service veterans should experience no disadvantage compared with other members of the community. The best possible healthcare should apply to all and should be equitable, and everyone should have access to that. Go raibh míle maith agat.

Mr O'Loan: I have significant concern about the Bill. However, I do not intend to push the Question on the motion to a Division. Instead, I am content for the Bill to move to Committee Stage and for it to be tested there. It may not survive those tests, but I want that scrutiny to occur.

I say to the proposer of the Bill that I respect his sentiments in bringing forward the Bill. I share his respect for the burden endured by the many people who have served in the British Army and for the hardship that those who return home have to live through for many years thereafter. We have all watched the recent conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, which is still continuing, and we have seen mostly young men go out with their health and return home in coffins. We have seen many others return home maimed for life. We often do not see the mental trauma suffered by many of them, and we are only beginning to understand, and see a glimmer of, the extent of that mental trauma. I acknowledge and respect all of that. I will go as far as to say that I am not speaking simply out of theory about those matters; I know something about them from personal family circumstances.

Nonetheless, I am concerned about the proposed legislation. I notice that the explanatory and financial memorandum states that the Bill was founded out of a White Paper issued in July 2008 to the Westminster Parliament about

government support to the armed forces, their families and veterans. However, as far as I can see from what we are told, that has not led to formal decisions about its outcome.

The proposals were sent to Northern Ireland for the Executive to consider. However, as I said, there is no evidence of any particular policy outcomes at Westminster. The explanatory and financial memorandum states:

"the Member in charge of the Bill formed the view that effective implementation"

of those proposals will require legislation to be made at the Assembly. However, I wonder whether that is perhaps premature.

I have concerns about a number of the Bill's provisions. Clause 1 would impose a burden on a large number of governmental authorities here, including Northern Ireland Departments, councils, education and library boards, health trusts and the Housing Executive. The clause would also impose a regulatory role on the Department of Finance and Personnel. All those public bodies would be obliged to have:

"due regard to the impact the exercise of such functions is likely to have on members of the services community or on members of the families".

The extent of that burden is unclear, but it may be considerable. The resource implications are also unclear.

Clause 2 relates to co-ordinators being appointed by Northern Ireland Departments. Again, the extent of that responsibility may be considerable. We are told in the explanatory and financial memorandum that clause 3 will require Northern Ireland Departments to consult with relevant Ministers in England, Scotland and Wales:

"before they exercise any function affecting the armed forces, veterans or their families (which, if exercised, would lead to an inconsistent approach being adopted in Northern Ireland)."

That may also place a considerable burden on Northern Ireland Departments and their agencies.

Clause 4 concerns a charter that relates to:

"promoting the civilian interests of members of the services community and members of the families of members of the services community."

We must ask whether the promotion of those interests will be done over and above the interests of others, as that would cause concern.

The explanatory and financial memorandum of the Bill tells us that:

"There are no equality or human rights issues arising from these proposals."

However, that surprises me, and it merits considerable further examination.

Those are my concerns about the Bill. Although I have expressed them, I will not attempt to stop the Bill at this stage. Those and other matters will no doubt form the basis for scrutiny during Committee Stage if the Bill survives this stage this evening

Mr Lyttle: Although the Alliance Party also has concerns about the Bill, it will not stand in the way of its passing to the next stage. The Alliance Party recognises that the armed services and veterans deserve our genuine respect. I welcome the assurances that have been given that those serving with the armed services will not be turned into a political issue in the House, and I recognise that the standards set by servicemen and servicewomen in this jurisdiction, in even the most extreme circumstances, are, rightly, second to none.

The Alliance Party has always recognised the sacrifice that individuals in the armed services and their families make. They deserve real and tangible support. My party has also taken a consistent, sensitive and respectful approach to recognising the sacrifice that servicemen and servicewomen make in serving in the most difficult conditions across the world. We also take that approach in recognising the sacrifice that their families make. As has been mentioned, those people's lives have been disrupted, and they have dealt with significant losses.

9.45 pm

In my own constituency, the Glentoran Community Trust, which runs community-based projects at home in Belfast and Dublin and as far away as Ghana, was presented with the British Legion Friends of the Forces 2010 Northern Ireland community award for its work towards the Home Comforts parcel appeal for servicemen and women in Afghanistan. The trust has also helped to raise money for the Irish Guards-dedicated Afghanistan fund, which assists with the rehabilitation of guardsmen and

women who were injured in service. I would like to take an opportunity to recognise the work of the trust and the many other unsung heroes in the sector.

The Alliance Party has the utmost respect for those who risk injury and their life to protect our freedom and security. We believe that they deserve practical, tangible support that looks at the resources that are available to them during and after service. Our concerns about the Bill include the extent of consultation that has been carried out to date. I am unclear about the Royal British Legion's position on the Bill and take on board the concerns about equality provision and the resourcing and financial implications. However, notwithstanding those concerns, we are happy for the Bill to progress to the next stage.

The Bill's purpose is to end disadvantage and support those who are wounded in service, as set out in the explanatory and financial memorandum. Since some of the key elements involved in the implementation of the command paper have been mentioned already, I will not go through them again. However, all Members can support health and housing provision, supported housing for service leavers, post-service training and concessionary travel.

I am content that some of the key recommendations that were made by the cross-government support for our armed services, their families and veterans remain outstanding for this region. We would accept further scrutiny of the Bill to examine its ability to improve the delivery of those recommendations and the support that is needed by the personnel and their families, who deal with the effects of service.

Mr G Robinson: I am proud to speak in this debate. My late father was a serviceman, and I am a member of the Enniskillen association. I work closely with many members of our armed forces, past and present. I have immense respect for them and the very professional job that they did, and still do, across the world. The debate is also an opportunity to say thank you to the veterans who served their country with dedication and distinction to ensure that are a free people today.

I also wish to say that the servicemen and their families who served in Northern Ireland for more than 30 years contributed to our economy and provided much civilian employment for it. I want to put that on record.

Members often use the term equality. This debate is about the equality of treatment for our service personnel and their families. The nature of the job that servicemen and women do, and the constant need for them to be posted here, there and everywhere across the world, means that they do not have a stable home in the way that we do. That is no reason for them to be denied the very best care when they need it most. That is particularly true in respect of service personnel who received the most horrendous injuries while serving their country. Those personnel need and deserve this country's thanks in a tangible way. That can be achieved through giving them easy access to the services that they and their families require.

Injured personnel may be recuperating at home, miles away from where the original treatment was given, but that should not lead to delays in treatment or mean that they are put to the bottom of waiting lists.

We must see them carry their previously designated priority with them. Their country asked them to do a job, and it should look after them when it has to. For veterans, and that term covers former personnel from those in their twenties to those in their nineties, access to medical care is an integral part of that proposal, especially as the years pass and needs increase, perhaps as a result of injury. I have dealt with one veteran who was unable to get NHS dentistry treatment. Is that the correct or moral way in which to treat those brave men and women? For me, the answer is no.

The families of soldiers, sailors and airmen also have difficulties owing to their constant moving. I have dealt with families of serving personnel and veterans who have been disadvantaged in obtaining health provision when required and to a timescale that matched their previous posting. Delay has not only a negative impact on service personnel but a detrimental impact on the entire family. That is not an equitable state, just because people chose to serve their country. I view the Armed Forces and Veterans Bill as a positive step to ensuring that equality of treatment is given to our servicemen and servicewomen. I wholeheartedly support the Bill and hope that everyone in the Assembly will do so as well. It will ensure equality for our serving personnel, their families and veterans.

In conclusion, I pay tribute to the late Captain Austin Ardill, who was a true unionist.

Mr Kinahan: I am delighted to be able to speak to the Bill's Second Stage. I, too, agree totally with its premise. Those who place themselves in the position of serving their country in the armed forces, risking life and limb carrying out their duty, deserve to know that, whatever happens, their country will look after them and their families properly.

The legislation is a case in point: the passing of a law that will give veterans of our armed forces in Northern Ireland parity with their colleagues in the rest of the UK. As a relatively new Member to this institution, I was appalled to find that that was not already the case, and I was even more appalled to hear that the legislation was stuck in the Executive. Common decency in any society means that its servicemen are looked after properly. That means its veterans and their families.

Many Members will know that I am an ex-serviceman, but I am not a veteran in knowledge and skill, or in age, although my children think so. I did not have to take the risks that servicemen take today or face the traumas that come with those risks. When people join up, it is out of a sense of duty or loyalty, or because the life of a serviceman is tempting. They do not join up for financial reasons or with any thought to how they will be looked after. They join a world of discipline that most of the public would never be able to put up with. They are part of a system 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 52 weeks a year. They do as they are told, go where they are ordered to go, and give their life to the system. Very few other careers, if any, ask for the same. They move house as often as required, live separately from their families, again as required, and put up with hardships and frustrations that no one else in the world would put up with. All that we are asking for Northern Ireland veterans in return is that they be given the decency of the same rights and help as their colleagues in the rest of the UK. I urge the Assembly to support the Bill's Second Stage of the Bill.

I also wish to point out that people from Northern Ireland who serve abroad, and subsequently leave regular service and become veterans, should not be disadvantaged and encouraged to live in other parts of the UK because they are cared for better there. They must be given all the support and help possible to ensure that they come back to their homes, where their families and their roots remain. I

want to see them all receive a proper duty of care. They should never be at a disadvantage over access to our Health Service, to housing, to schools, to transport, to childcare provision or even to training for life as a civilian once they leave.

Each of those matters has been described in good detail earlier in the debate. Therefore, I do not intend to go into them now. However, as far as equality is concerned, my party is not asking that ex-military personnel get preference over clinical priorities in the Health Service: it simply asks for fairness in all areas.

Northern Ireland has a proud record of military service. An estimated 5,000 personnel are stationed here and possibly as many as 300,000 ex-military personnel. As I said, any civilised society looks after its service personnel. Northern Ireland must do so too. I call on the Assembly to support the Bill and for the Committee to give it the decency of quick and smooth passage.

Mr K Robinson: I also want to express my condolences to the family of the late Captain Austin Ardill. One piece of advice that he gave me as a very young man was to join the Ulster Unionist Party. I will leave it to history to judge whether that was good advice. Certainly, all of the kind words that have been said about him tonight are well meant and, I am sure, will be felt by his extended family.

I had not intended to speak in the debate; I had come to the Chamber to support David McNarry in bringing the Bill before the House. However, I listened to Mickey Brady and his definition of a veteran as someone who has served for a year and a day. It appears, therefore, that I qualify as a veteran, having been a member of the reserve forces for slightly longer than that.

I also served for six years in Germany with Service Children's Education. In fact, Mr McFarland, who sits on the far Benches, was unfortunate enough to be in the same garrison, although, fortunately for him, at a different time.

Mr Bell: So were the children.

Mr K Robinson: So were the children, yes.

It is a serious issue. I detect concern from the far side of the House that advantage might be given to the armed forces and veterans. The Bill does not seek to give such an advantage. It seeks to give parity of esteem and provision.

I will give some idea of what moving involves for service families. Every 18 months to two years, they have to up sticks with their families. A family has to pack up the few belongings that they are allowed to carry with them into six or eight movement forwarding order (MFO) boxes — big, square boxes — into which go the children's toys, the wife's bits and pieces and the serviceman's own particular little treasures. Those belongings are then carted off out of sight. The family may be lucky enough to meet up with them in the not-too-distant future, or their belongings may end up in Singapore while they end up in Solihull.

Therefore, families are very much in the arms of Army, Navy or Air Force systems. As Danny Kinahan said, servicemen accept all of that: it is part and parcel of what they have chosen as individuals. Their families must also accept the situation. Every 18 months to two years, their children, who have just settled in at school, must move to another school, which is not just up or down the road but, possibly, on the other side of the world. Certainly, if someone leaves Lisburn or one of the other bases in Northern Ireland, he or she could end up in north-west Europe, usually Germany, or in parts of the Middle East, possibly Cyprus.

In the military system, that cumulative moving of children is called "turbulence". It has an impact on their educational attainment. Children who ordinarily would go through certain stages of development, have to move just as they are about to reach their potential. They have to adjust to a new setting, home, school, teacher and friends. Every so often, the whole process is repeated. It becomes a way of life for them.

Over the years, the military has adapted. I believe that George Robinson mentioned that it has put in place many additional support systems. In particular, Army units have that down to perfection. The station staff officer (SSO) looks after families' housing needs. The Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association (SSAFA) looks after families' community needs.

However, when military personnel come to the end of their service, basically the door opens and they go through it. To a large extent, they are on their own; not just the individuals who signed up, but their wives and children as well, regardless of their ages. Therefore, the impact is ongoing on the lives of those families and,

indeed, on the lives of their wider family circles. The Bill tries to address those matters so that when folk come out of their service career, they are given the opportunity to gain a firm footing in the society in which they choose to live. Obviously, some will go back across the water. Some, from here, will settle across the water, perhaps because their wives come from there.

However, we have an increasing number of servicemen here who have been here, have family connections here and have married into our society, and they want to stay in Northern Ireland. What David McNarry is highlighting is that those people are being short-changed.

10.00 pm

Those people are not just army personnel; I want to stress that, as someone with a member of my own family who has been in the Gulf with the Royal Naval Reserve and is due to go back shortly to God knows where with the Royal Naval Reserve again. I know the impact not only on that boy's family, but on me, my wife and my extended family. At least he has a job to go back to at the end of his service, but for someone who has made a career of 12, 15, 16, or 20-odd years in the military, it is very hard to settle back into society.

I say to the folk at the far side of the Chamber: yes, have your reservations and pursue this Bill through the Committee and make sure that there is nothing to give advantage to these folk, but please make sure that they are not disadvantaged in any way, because they have given their lives and the lives of their families in a variety of ways. We see the horrible injuries coming back and, unfortunately, the coffins coming back. Much harder to quantify is the number of families coming back, whose children have lost out so much in their years of development. It has a long-term impact on them. I thank the Members on the far side of the Chamber for their positive comments, but I ask them to think very seriously about the parity aspect of this.

Mr McFarland: I will start off by expressing condolences to the family of Captain Austin Ardill; he was a famous unionist who did sterling service for the Ulster Unionist Party in his time.

I would like to make a declaration: I fit into the veteran category, having spent 18 years in Her Majesty's forces. I congratulate David McNarry

on bringing this Bill forward and allowing us to concentrate our minds on this issue.

The legislation in GB was brought forward as a thank-you to the military system, to veterans and serving personnel. It is known colloquially as the military covenant and was brought into sharp focus again with the recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, when it was discovered that wounded soldiers were coming back and were being left in hospital corridors while their families were living in shambolic houses. Over the last few years, the military covenant has been renewed and the legislation was brought in in England.

Therefore, the issue is one of equality between all the citizens in the United Kingdom. Why should personnel, serving or veterans, who live here be totally disadvantaged by the fact that they are in Northern Ireland, whereas if they were in Scotland, England or Wales, they would be looked after much better? All of the First World War veterans are gone now. We do have survivors from the Second World War, and we have a large number of retired personnel here and a number of serving personnel in the garrison here.

The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have put a focus on the debt that society owes to people who put themselves in harm's way. Anyone who has watched television programmes recently will know of the horrific injuries suffered in those wars by the soldiers, whose courage is just amazing. When you are young, aged 18 to 20, you are fireproof, and nothing troubles you much. But there is a difficulty with veterans in that the older they get, the more their experiences prey on their mind. We have seen a substantial increase in post-traumatic stress disorder, in Northern Ireland and in GB, and it is going to get worse, because there is a legacy of the last 30 years here in Northern Ireland and there will be a legacy of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Therefore, this health issue is not going to go away; in fact, it is an enormous time bomb, and its effects will come back to haunt us eventually.

Many of the veterans who live here are English, Scottish and Welsh retired personnel who married and live locally. A number of them are my constituents, and they come to me. They have problems with regard to worrying about their security, going to hospitals and sitting in waiting rooms. Some of the hospitals are in

areas in which they might not feel particularly welcome. Therefore, we have an issue of how we look after our retired veterans here.

The UDR, the Royal Irish and the RUC, particularly the UDR and the Royal Irish, have a system whereby some of their people are able to access the Police Rehabilitation Trust, which is designed to deal with people who are having problems with their mental state. Some of them can avail themselves of that, but the regular veterans here have nothing, and it becomes a major issue for them. It is also an issue, to a degree, for the serving personnel and families in the garrisons here, because they too sometimes feel that they cannot access medical services and other things as they would do if they were living in a garrison in England. It is a reflection on our society that we cannot welcome people from our armed services who are back and forward from Iraq. When they are living amongst us, they do not feel as comfortable as they should do.

I want to give an example of what I am talking about. I have a letter that a constituent had back from the Veterans Agency. It reads:

"Thank you for your recent request regarding priority treatment in respect of your war pensioned accepted disabilities. May I explain that the health authorities in Northern Ireland do not automatically provide priority treatment for ex-service personnel. Unfortunately, in view that there are no current arrangements in Northern Ireland for priority treatment for war-disabled pensioners, we are unable to help you in this particular instance. I apologise for this disappointing reply."

If you are good enough to serve your country, be injured and be on a disabled pension in England, Scotland or Wales, that is OK; they will look after you. The moment that you come back to Northern Ireland to live, I am sorry to say, you are definitely a second-class citizen. We should reserve a bit of shame for that.

The situation is not acceptable, and I commend David McNarry for bringing this forward. I urge Members to support the Bill.

Mr McNarry: May I thank Members. I do not do it on behalf of anybody except perhaps myself, because I knew Austin Ardill so very well. I lost touch with him but got to know him again. I thank all those Members who have made their tributes to him.

Jonathan Bell was the first Member to speak in the debate. I thank him for his support. As he illustrated, this discussion can always be brought home to a local situation, and he did that for us very adequately. I do not want to be frivolous in any part of this debate, but for Jonathan to confess that he was being brief was a tribute in itself to the debate. I appreciate the appropriateness of the words that he used.

Mickey Brady did what he said he would do; he opposed the Bill. I think that Mickey was opposing it on an equality issue. Equality is an issue that ties the Assembly up in knots, because one person's idea of equality is not always another person's idea of equality. Sometimes we stretch what we mean by equality. If I did not believe that there was inequality in what I was seeing and hearing was happening to human beings, I would not have brought this Bill forward. It is on the basis of the inequalities that I see that I have laid the Bill before the Assembly for its Second Stage.

10.15 pm

I was disappointed when Mickey talked about health protocol. Perhaps there is a misunderstanding, and I hope that there is. My Bill does not seek priority for any veteran under any circumstances. Perhaps, Mickey will read Hansard tomorrow, particularly the piece in which I referred to priorities, and reflect on what I said. He said that there was the possibility of a two-tier situation developing within the Health Service. I am sure that that is the last thing that anybody wants to see, and it is most certainly not the intention of the Bill, nor do I believe that the Health Service — not just in its present condition, but in any condition — would entertain that. I cannot see that happening.

If Mr Brady agrees — he said that he does — that no one should be disadvantaged, then, Mickey, you are agreeing with me, because that is exactly what I am saying. No one should be disadvantaged, but, unfortunately, it is the case that the armed services, their families and the veterans are being disadvantaged. Nevertheless, I thank you and respect your contribution, and I hope that, when we move further with the Bill, the opposition that you have voiced may be less on the case that you have made; I hope that you do not introduce any other cases for opposing the Bill.

Declan O'Loan did not wish to kill the Bill here. I am grateful for that, Declan, but seemingly you

are willing to give it a slow death in Committee, and I am ungrateful for that, because I do not think it deserves it. I understand your wish for it to be discussed in Committee, but that is not under my direction. The Committees have had ample opportunity to discuss it. I think that you will appreciate that, although the Department of Finance and Personnel, because of the minimum financial impact, but also the protection —

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

Mr McNarry: I beg your pardon, Mr Deputy Speaker. I am sure that you will agree that there are a number of Committees that would need to discuss the Bill, and it appears to me that, in not discussing it, the Committees are quite content — as in this case they should be — to allow the House to be the arbitrator and to take the matter forward. Nevertheless, we will see how that goes. However, I do hope, Declan, that you will have a change of heart if the Bill reaches its next stage in the Assembly. I say that because I have heard his concerns, Mr Deputy Speaker, and hopefully he will, through your kind permission, allow me to address them when we next discuss the Bill in the House. I ask that the Member perhaps go home tonight reassured that the intention is not to give advantage to anyone — I am sorry that people are picking that up — but to redress the disadvantage that so obviously exists, which is the reason for bringing the Bill forward.

I appreciate Chris Lyttle's genuine respect for the people that the Bill addresses. He said that they deserve genuine respect and that he was offering genuine respect. Unfortunately, he then added that inevitable little word that we have in here: "but". Nevertheless, I thank him for the recognition that he gave on behalf of his party to the armed forces, their families and the veterans. That is part of what I hope will end up being the safe passage of the Bill. I hope that we not only respect the Bill but recognise what we are talking about and how the Bill can make a difference. It is important that we do what we can in the Assembly to make a difference to people's lives when they are disadvantaged.

I appreciate the Member's concerns about consultation and his doubts about the financial elements. I note those concerns. It was perhaps remiss of me to give just one line to the Assembly

stating that there would be no serious financial consequences to the Bill. There cannot be.

We already have the facilities, but we are neglecting to help people to access them. The hospitals and schools are there; everything that Mr Lyttle is concerned about is already in place. All we need to do is give those people access to facilities.

However, I have taken on board his points and the concerns of Mr O'Loan and Mr Brady. Should the opportunity arise, and the Assembly tonight supports the passage of the Bill to the next Stage, I promise them that I will address their concerns when the opportunity arises.

I thank George Robinson for saying "thank you" to those whom the Bill identifies; he spoke for everyone in the Assembly. It does not take much to say thank you, but thank you, George, for saying thank you on their behalf. I also thank him for zoning in on the high equality content in the Bill, because the Bill focuses on equality. Some who spoke before him seem to have missed the point that I was making about equality. George, I appreciate your helping me with that.

Danny Kinahan, my colleague — and in this instance, folks, you are all my colleagues, because I need your support. We are not outside; we are in here. I thank Danny for his support. His reference to common decency was necessary, as was his perspective of today's life as he knows it. He knows the difference between his time and the present time for members of the forces. Danny gave us an insight as a former member of the services. His contribution was, therefore, not only welcome, but it also told a story that only people such as Danny who have that experience can share with those in need and help those who do not understand to embrace that understanding from Danny's perspective.

My good friend Ken Robinson had not intended to speak but was moved to do so after listening to others. He was also moved to help others, because he wanted to identify with the lifestyle common to families of the forces. He gave us a brief picture of what happened in his day. The shame is that it has not changed; otherwise we would not need the Bill.

It took an awful long time for England, Scotland and Wales to improve conditions for veterans and their families; we here have the opportunity

to do the same. I trust that Members noted his use of the term "turbulence". Reading the section about turbulence should convince even the greatest doubter, perhaps not in the Chamber tonight, but floating about.

Alan McFarland brought to the discussion his undoubted knowledge gained from personal experience and his genuine interest in military matters. I thank Alan for his support and for his detailed analysis of the veterans' situation.

I would like to focus the issue for a minute. I have no political agenda, and I am certainly not introducing anything like that into the debate. However, doing that might help us, and I hope that it will, because we all think it. It might help us as a family in the Assembly, given that we represent very diverse communities at times. It might help us when we refocus on what Alan McFarland said, which was that we "cannot welcome" forces' members home. The truth is that we can and we do. However, his point is that there are still some who are unable to welcome the forces home.

I have come into this Assembly, along with many others, intent on getting things right, on getting things done and on listening to and respecting others. A catchphrase to do with the body politic seems to have developed inside and outside the Assembly. That catchphrase is "moving on".

If we really want to show that we are moving on and if we really want to grasp what that means, perhaps the safe passage of the Bill, without opposition, can display that, in truth, we are ready to move on. I hope that no one will fail that test. I am ready to move on, and I am ready and willing to bring others with me.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Second Stage of the Armed Forces and Veterans Bill [NIA 33/09] be agreed.

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

Motion made:

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

Adjournment

Ambulance Cover in Lagan Valley

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Members that the proposer of the topic for debate will have 15 minutes to speak; all other Members who wish to speak will have approximately eight minutes.

Mr Craig: I welcome the opportunity to raise this issue in the House. I was going to thank the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for being in attendance, but I do not see him.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. Could Members resume their seats, please.

Mr Craig: I see that the Minister is now in attendance; I thank him for waiting to such a late hour.

I begin by paying tribute to those members of the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service Trust who work day and night to ensure that people's calls are answered. I think that the entire House will agree with that. The staff of the Ambulance Service, all National Health Service staff and staff in the Fire and Rescue Service, all of whom are responsible for saving lives, are the true heroes for our society.

When the news broke that obstetric services were to be withdrawn from Lagan Valley Hospital, the Minister announced that he would provide two new ambulances for the Lagan Valley area. Those ambulances would be responsible for taking urgent medical or surgical interventions to other hospitals, probably to the Royal Victoria Hospital in Belfast. It turned out that those ambulances came in the form of rapid response vehicles, which are basically estate cars, manned by paramedics, that carry specialist equipment.

On 21 September 2010, the Minister responded to an Adjournment debate on the future of the Lagan Valley Hospital accident and emergency facilities. He spoke about the transformation of

the Ambulance Service over the past 20 years. He said:

"In effect, we ensure that we can take the A&E to the patient, which is what happens now with the very high quality Ambulance Service. It is not about going out, ringing a bell and scooping people up to take them back to the nearest hospital, it is about getting that emergency care out through the Ambulance Service and stabilising the patient before going to the appropriate hospital." — [Official Report, Bound Volume 55, p218, col 1].

I agree with the Minister; his statement is correct. However, I question whether that is actually the case in Lagan Valley.

Patients who are met by a rapid response vehicle are treated at the scene. There is no doubt that they get first-class treatment when they are met, but, unfortunately, the paramedic is not able to take them to the hospital in that vehicle: they have to wait. Although we are told that both a rapid response vehicle and an ambulance are sent to the job at the same time, experience tells us that, in many cases, the ambulance takes quite a while to reach the scene of the accident. In effect, rapid response vehicles are being used as a means to provide positive response times for the purposes of statistics. In that regard, they are probably effective. They are meeting the set rapid response times. Although I believe that they are of some value and have a place in responding to patients who, by and large, need first aid, they are, unfortunately, not always the answer for those who need to get to hospital urgently. Nevertheless, those who need to be taken to hospital may need to wait for a considerable period before an ambulance arrives.

When introduced to Lagan Valley, it was believed that rapid response vehicles would somehow meet the needs of patients who require urgent medical and surgical intervention. That was the basis of their introduction. I am starting to question whether they were an effective item to be introduced to Lagan Valley. At present, patients who require major medical intervention or surgery bypass Lagan Valley Hospital and are taken to the Royal Victoria Hospital in Belfast, and that journey takes some 20 minutes. That presents obstacles for patients, who may be in considerable pain, results in delay and, at times, overloads the A&E facilities in Belfast. I know of many occasions when that have occurred. I appreciate that the ambulance team can provide

some pain relief, but they are limited in what they can do for the patient.

Another point that I want to make to the Minister is that, in order to take the patient to a Belfast hospital or, indeed, any hospital, an ambulance is required. Rapid response vehicles are almost useless in those circumstances. Those vehicles were argued to be a necessary improvement following the removal of the obstetrics unit from Lagan Valley Hospital. They were to be a tool to ease pressure on the Ambulance Service in Lagan Valley, but so far they have proved to be of little value. The ambulance team in Lagan Valley, at times, struggles to cope with the pressure, while relying on ambulances from as far away as Downpatrick, Craigavon and Antrim to help to deal with the demand.

I have another, more serious issue to raise with the Minister: he promised Lagan Valley two rapid response vehicles, which were to be used when one of the ambulances was withdrawn.

I have no doubt that the Minister was told that that was the case. Unfortunately, however, up to now, only one rapid response vehicle has come into use in Lagan Valley.

10.30 pm

In December 2009, one ambulance was taken away and replaced, supposedly, by two rapid response vehicles. Although I had my concerns and doubts about whether that change would improve the service in Lagan Valley, we were all told to give it the benefit of the doubt. It is concerning to learn that, since then, only one of those vehicles has been in use.

There seem to be issues with getting paramedics, in particular, to use those vehicles. I have been informed that, in some way, using the rapid response vehicles (RRVs) leads to a loss of earnings for them. Concerns have also been raised with me and others about the higher risk for the practitioners because they are out on their own when responding to situations. We all know about the litigation that takes place. It seems remarkable that people who go to save someone's life can end up being sued by those whose lives they saved, but there are numerous examples of that having happened. Perhaps that says more about today's society than anything else. Paramedics have legitimate concerns about being on their own. However, that has led to the situation in which one of those rapid response vehicles has not turned a

wheel since the day and hour that it was put in place. That is regrettable, and it puts additional pressure on the services in Lagan Valley and further afield.

Another interesting fact came to light about the vehicle that is in operation. I thought that it would have been used to its full capacity, but it seems that, for whatever reason — I do not have an explanation — that is not the case. I do not know whether there are manning or management issues, but the figures that were presented to me were alarming. In April 2010, that vehicle was fully utilised, for the intended number of hours, on only 11 days. In May 2010, the figure was 12 days; in June, it was only 17 days; in July, it was nine days; in August, it was 12 days; in September, it was 12 days; and in October, it was three days. Not only are the two vehicles not operating but the area has been left with one vehicle that is being only partially used. I ask the Minister to investigate that situation on behalf of the people of Lagan Valley because it puts the system under undue pressure.

When we discussed the A&E situation a couple of weeks ago, the Minister, rightly or wrongly, argued that the reduction in A&E services would be offset by an increase in emergency services in Lagan Valley. At the time, I wanted to question the Minister about that, but I was not allowed to do so. It is only fair that I raise that issue in the House tonight, because the Minister's argument was based entirely on the increase in emergency services cover in Lagan Valley. I was alarmed to find that, in practice, a substantial portion of that additional resource had never been put in place.

I do not doubt that A&E cover will be reduced. Obstetrics are going, and that will put even more pressure on the existing services at Lagan Valley Hospital. I plead with the Minister to investigate the situation and try to sort it out. I am not here to lambast the Minister; I do not see any point in that. I would much prefer the Minister to get the situation in the Lagan Valley site sorted out urgently and turn it around.

I have no doubt that the Minister meant what he said, believed what was being said, and that the advice given to him at the time no doubt dictated that. However, the reality of the situation does not match up with that advice, so I plead with him to investigate the situation at Lagan Valley and, if possible, get it rectified.

I am certain that the other changes that are taking place at the Lagan Valley Hospital site will dictate an increased use of accident and emergency services there. I do not want to see anyone's life being put at risk and, doubtlessly, nor does the Minister. I so propose.

Mr B McCrea: The hour is late, so I do not propose to detain people unnecessarily. However the debate is a matter of concern for me, being a Member for Lagan Valley. I was interested to hear what the Member who secured the Adjournment debate had to say on the matter, and I have no doubt that the Minister will be able to deal with a lot of the issues that have been raised.

However, it occurs to me that I have some points to contribute to the discussion. First, I am a member of the Northern Ireland Policing Board, which receives a lot of statistical information regarding the performance of the PSNI. A number of key statistics have come forward. One of the most telling statistic concerns the number of deaths that happen on our roads.

Only last week, the Policing Board received a welcome report on that topic, which revealed that the number of road deaths across the Province has reduced dramatically. A long-term trend has been reversed. People of all parties lined up to congratulate those responsible for that. Whoever is responsible, some measure of congratulation is due for the way in which we seem to be able, at this moment, to prevent deaths. Whatever the strategy is, statistics show that it appears to be working. I pay tribute to a number of agencies involved, not just the Health Service, but the PSNI, the Fire and Rescue Service, which is part of the Minister's Department.

I recently attended an interesting initiative involving the Fire Service and PSNI at Hillsborough, during which the Fire Service from Lisburn explained how things happen in a traffic accident, the dangers that present to young males in particular, the length of time it takes to deal with an accident, the way in which pain relief is administered and the various things that are done. I was really struck by the professionalism of the Fire Service and the PSNI in dealing with road incidents. An awful lot of the event was educational and aimed at trying to reduce accident rates.

I was also struck by what people said about where casualties might go to receive treatment in such a situation. I do not know whether it is apocryphal, but I have been told that it is really important for someone involved in a serious accident to get to a hospital most suited to treat their particular condition. For those of us in Lisburn, that may well be the Royal Victoria Hospital, which is eight minutes away by road.

I acknowledge that there is concern in my constituency that that approach may, in some way, take resources away from one hospital to give them to another — robbing Peter to pay Paul, as it were. However, many of the issues regarding the standard of care that we need to provide are driven by the professional institutions; the doctors and the medical professions. We want to give a world class service that is appropriate. The proposer mentioned insurance claims and various issues, but it is essential to meet the standards of professional medical bodies.

Therefore, when it comes to all that, of course Mr Craig is right to raise concerns, which no doubt the Minister will be able to address, but we should all celebrate the fact that we have seen a dramatic reduction in road traffic deaths across Northern Ireland. If we all work together, we can drive down that figure even further.

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Mr McGimpsey): I welcome the opportunity that the debate provides to praise the excellent performance of the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service in Lagan Valley when responding to emergency calls from the public. A modern, twenty-first-century ambulance service is not merely a transport service; it is the front line of emergency medical care. In reality, it is the front line of the modern Health Service, capable of delivering a much higher level of quality clinical care than ever before. The men and women, skilled health professionals all, who deliver that vital life-saving service deserve to have the best modern equipment, vehicles and technology to allow them to deliver a quality service to the public as safely and effectively as possible.

Lagan Valley falls within the south-eastern local commissioning group area. Provisional performance figures for the end of September show that 71% of category A — life-threatening — calls are being responded to within eight minutes. That performance is well above the

target for individual commissioning group areas, which is that, by the end of March, not less than 67·5% of category A calls should be responded to. Therefore, the Ambulance Service in Lagan Valley is exceeding its target.

RRVs have shown themselves to be very effective. In fact, when an RRV is dispatched, it is followed quickly by an A&E ambulance, which arrives usually within 20 minutes of the RRV's being dispatched. As Mr Craig said, each RRV contains a skilled paramedic and, apart from a stretcher and a spine board, it carries equipment that is almost identical to that in an A&E ambulance. He was correct in saying that RRVs cannot transport patients, but that eventuality is covered by the following A&E ambulance.

Progress has been hard won. When I first became Minister, the performance for life-threatening calls was 55%. It now stands at nearly 72%, so I am sure that Members will wish to join me in expressing heartfelt appreciation for the work carried out by the front line staff of the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service.

An important component of that improvement is the use of the latest technology, such as new automatic vehicle location and satellite navigation systems to ensure that the nearest ambulance responds to an emergency and is sent by the shortest route; new geographic information systems, including digital mapping; and new computer-assisted dispatch systems, telephony systems and digital radio systems.

The huge improvement, which has been achieved against a background of ever-increasing demand, averaging at around 8,000 extra calls a year, did not happen by chance. Improvement came only after the implementation of a programme of reform and modernisation, as well as the very considerable investment that I made in the Ambulance Service. The House will recall that, in 2008, I announced a major investment in the Ambulance Service, totalling some £100 million over the next 10 years, to allow it to modernise its estate and to replace its fleet and equipment regularly. Over the 2008-2011 comprehensive spending review (CSR) period, that included a £17 million investment to purchase 60 new A&E ambulances, 60 non-emergency vehicles and 26 rapid response vehicles. In addition, I made a further £12·1 million of revenue funding available for the Ambulance Service over the CSR period to allow it to modernise its services,

respond quicker to emergency calls and deliver life-saving emergency care.

However, it is not just about providing more ambulances and equipment; it is about people and new and more efficient ways of working. The recent improvement in performance in Lagan Valley and elsewhere means that the Ambulance Service is getting to more patients faster than ever before, and that has real potential to save more lives.

10.45 pm

I am talking about empowering and supporting the Ambulance Service so that it can provide a modern, fit-for-purpose service that ensures that patients presenting at an incident are clinically assessed, receive the appropriate treatment in order to stabilise their condition, and that, where appropriate, they are transported to an A&E hospital as quickly as possible. In short, it is about saving lives, which is what the Ambulance Service does day-in, day-out, 24/7.

That is the critical outcome that public representatives need to bear in mind during any discussion about the Ambulance Service. It is crucially important to ensure that the Ambulance Service is properly funded to carry out its essential and life-saving work. One outstanding aspect of the improvement in the service that can be achieved is, for example, thrombolysis — the administration of clot-busting drugs to patients who suffer heart attacks. That is something that would not have been considered for the ambulances even 10 years ago, and is proof of the merit of having highly trained paramedics with enhanced clinical skills ensuring that they arrive as quickly as possible in rapid response vehicles, followed by the A&E ambulance.

I spoke earlier about achieving outcomes. That means getting patients to hospital as quickly as possible and saving lives. It is important to note that, in the Lagan Valley area, the Ambulance Service deploys its emergency resources by using a tactical deployment plan to ensure that the nearest appropriate response vehicle is sent to an incident. That means that the response to an emergency call in the Lagan Valley area may be provided by an ambulance or an RRV that is not based in the ambulance stations in Lisburn or Derriaghy. I am asked about that regularly. It means that in any emergency anywhere in Northern Ireland, the nearest ambulance will respond. Most people will take

the view that when they lift the phone to get urgent help they do not ask for the Lisburn or Derriaghy ambulance; they just want the nearest ambulance to respond. As recent figures show, the public can rely on an ambulance arriving in good time with highly skilled help at hand.

It is misleading to focus on counting the number of ambulances housed in a particular ambulance station when a lifesaving response can come from the nearest ambulance or RRV, regardless of where that resource is normally based. It is also worth noting that by the end of the 2008-2011 CSR period, paramedic response capacity in Northern Ireland, by which I mean the total A&E and RRV emergency response capability, will have increased by some 65,000 hours to almost 580,000 hours of cover. It is not just in front line ambulances where clinical input has increased; the Ambulance Service now uses medical doctors in the control room to manage and deal with calls to ensure that the most urgent life-threatening incidents are responded to as quickly as possible.

I also wish to address the Ambulance Service efficiency savings, which were introduced during this CSR period. Those efficiency savings have not resulted in the sort of cataclysmic meltdown in emergency response times that some folk had been suggesting. In fact, the truth of the matter is very much to the contrary. Our Ambulance Service has transformed itself with great success into a twenty-first century service that is capable of dealing with the emergency care needs of our population. The performance statistics speak for themselves.

I will investigate the points that Mr Craig has made in relation to the availability of ambulances. I know that the number of paramedic hours available in Lisburn and Derriaghy have increased substantially as a result of the investment. Mr Craig made the charge that the ambulance stations in Lisburn and Derriaghy are not properly or fully manned, when, in fact, the complement in Lisburn should be two A&E ambulances and an RRV, and in Derriaghy, one A&E ambulance and an RRV. I want to reassure Mr Craig — and myself — that the situation is under control and is delivering the sort of service that the people of Lisburn deserve.

When I last enquired about the issue of paramedics being reluctant to use RRVs, I was informed that there was a waiting list for paramedics to get into RRVs. I will ask that

question again. It is some months since I last asked the question, but when I did, the Ambulance Service reported no problems whatsoever in recruiting paramedics to RRVs.

I want to conclude by issuing an alert that any future cut to the health budget will threaten the excellent and improving performance of the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service in Lagan Valley and throughout Northern Ireland. Therefore, it is vital that all public representatives unite to defend vital front line health services, such as the Ambulance Service, and thereby shield it and other critical areas of the Health Service from potential cuts in expenditure.

Adjourned at 10.50 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 18 October 2010

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Assembly Business

Mr Speaker: I have something that I need to say at the start of the sitting concerning Tuesday's debate in the Chamber when some things were said that should not have been said. Members should know by now that I expect a certain standard of debate in the Chamber and that they are to treat other Members with dignity and courtesy. However, that certainly did not happen in the House on Tuesday evening.

I have reviewed Hansard, and I am sorry to say that, on both days last week, the remarks of a number of Members fell far short of the good standards of a parliamentary democracy anywhere. I defy any Member to tell me that the Members who made the remarks that I read in Hansard would get away with making them anywhere else — they certainly would not.

I am even more concerned to note that some very serious challenges were made to the authority of the Deputy Speakers. I am considering a number of remarks, and I assure the House that some Members will be hearing from me. I do not know how many times I have raised the issue of challenging the authority of the Chair. All Members know that whoever is in the Chair has a difficult enough job to do, but what makes it worse is Members telling the Chair what they think a point of order is. When Members approach the Table to ask the person in the Chair whether or not another Member's remarks were unparliamentary, it beggars belief. I have said this so many times in the House, but I am going to repeat it: I will not allow anybody to challenge the authority of the Chair; it will not happen. My job is to protect — totally and absolutely — the integrity of the House and that of its proceedings and work.

I keep repeating myself, but some of the remarks that I read in Hansard would not be allowed in a parliamentary democracy anywhere

else, and they will certainly not be allowed here. I have no intention of taking any points of order on the issue. I intend to deal with it in the strongest way that I can and with the authority that I have.

Members know exactly when they have said something in such a way that it hurts another Member. When Members rise to their feet, they know what they are saying and what they are going to say, and it is totally wrong if it is said in such a way as to hurt another Member. Robust debate can take place in the Chamber, and, on occasions, a debate can raise tensions in the House. As I have said from the Chair on a number of occasions, I am very happy with robust debate. In fact, on occasions, I enjoy a bit of banter across the Chamber. There is nothing wrong with that provided that it does not get out of control and that we do not say things to Members knowing that that will cause major problems. That is where I need to draw the line; after all, it is a debating Chamber. I will leave it at that.

Mr Campbell: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. On Monday 11 October, during Question Time, I asked a supplementary question to the deputy First Minister. I made the specific reference that, in the areas where the deputy First Minister's party has the most electoral support, there is hardly a Protestant about the place. The deputy First Minister's reply was:

"I could not accept that for one minute." — [Official Report, Bound Volume 56, p116, col 1].

Mr Speaker, I have written to you this morning, and I have copied that letter to each and every Sinn Féin MLA, with the incontrovertible evidence for what I asked the deputy First Minister about. Perhaps, in the future, Ministers could try to reply accurately to questions, rather than doing so inaccurately, which requires the action that I have had to take to rectify

the situation. Perhaps you can have a look at Hansard, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: I have not received the letter yet. Let me look at the letter and come back to the Member directly.

Executive Committee Business

Justice Bill: First Stage

The Minister of Justice (Mr Ford): I beg to introduce the Justice Bill (NIA Bill 1/10), which is a Bill to make provision for an offender levy; to amend the law relating to measures for vulnerable and intimidated witnesses and live links; to make provision for policing and community safety partnerships; to make provision regulating certain sporting events; to amend the law relating to the treatment of offenders; to make provision for penalty notices and conditional cautions; to amend the law on legal aid; to amend the law on bail; to make other amendments relating to the administration of civil and criminal justice; 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.

Private Members' Business

Multiple Sclerosis Services

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

Mr Ross: I beg to move

That this Assembly calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to review and improve the facilities available to, and treatment for, people who are suffering from multiple sclerosis.

Last year, the Multiple Sclerosis Society held a series of events around the Province, one of which was held in my constituency in Larne and which I, my colleague David Hilditch and the Ulster Unionist Member for East Antrim Ken Robinson attended. We found that to be a very moving and powerful event, and the opportunity to listen to people who live with MS every day and to hear about the struggles that they go through and what could make their lives easier was good for us and certainly increased our knowledge of the illness. I am quite sure that Members who attended similar events in their constituencies will have had a similar experience, and, indeed, the number of Assembly questions that have been submitted to the Health Minister on the issue of MS since those meetings is testament to the impact that it has had on many Members.

Although I am no expert on MS, and most people are not, those events have raised my awareness of and interest in MS, and I have come to ask more questions about the sort of help that people currently get and the increased help that they could get.

For example, I was told a story about a young man in his late 20s, whose symptoms include wobbly legs and slurred speech. His young age and his symptoms mean that, when he goes out at night, people assume that he is drunk. That has led to him to want to stay in his house and to not go out, because he is afraid of the stigma that is attached to the matter. Hearing real-life examples of the social exclusion that can come with the illness is very powerful. Indeed, such

social exclusion can, in many cases, lead to mental illness.

MS has a huge, life-changing impact on not only those diagnosed with the illness but their partners, friends and wider families. It is a chronic debilitating neurological condition in which the body's immune system attacks the central nervous system, disrupting signals from the brain. It is the greatest cause of disability among young adults, particularly those between the ages of 20 and 40. We are also aware that women are three times more likely than men to be diagnosed with MS. However, MS is known somewhat as the forgotten illness, in the sense that many people are unaware of what it is, of what help there is and of what help there could be for those with the illness. In the Great Hall this morning, I spoke to some members of the MS Society. They are delighted that the Assembly is now debating the issue and that awareness about MS is being raised this afternoon.

MS has a number of different symptoms, and people can suffer from a relapsing, remitting form of it. However, it is always a progressive illness. Therefore, it is not something for which we can have a simple one-size-fits-all support programme for each and every individual. Rather, we have to have a range of services available to help those with MS, from those with the most aggressive type, who, as examples have shown, from the moment of diagnosis could be in a wheelchair or could even lose their lives in a short number of years, to those who do not have as severe a form of MS and could, perhaps, avail themselves of drugs and physiotherapy at timely interventions to help them.

The most startling fact that was raised at the recent meetings was that, compared with anywhere else in the world, Northern Ireland has a disproportionately high number of people suffering from MS. In my East Antrim constituency, that statistic is particularly acute. Perhaps, therefore, it is surprising that we do not put more resources into and emphasis on MS. Given that we have so many people suffering from it, it must be asked why Northern Ireland has not tried to become a centre of best practice for services for people with MS. Somewhere in the region of 4,000 people in Northern Ireland have MS, and they are asking why there is no clear strategy in the Health Service to deal with it. There is widespread concern in Northern Ireland that we have not

fully implemented the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) guidelines, which would ensure that those with MS are not failed by the system.

In the past number of years, two significant statements have come from the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS). In 2002, the Department carried out a review of neurology services, and, in 2009, Minister McGimpsey announced that there would be an additional review. However, no progress on that review has been reported to the MS Society, and it is unaware of the review's status. In April 2010, the Minister announced that a neurology network would be established. Again, however, no progress has been reported on that. We do not know whether any tangible results will flow from it, nor do we know whether the money that was earmarked for the network was one-off or recurring funding. That makes it very difficult to plan and to get the tangible results that I mentioned.

Although the cause of MS is unknown, and there is no cure for it, a number of measures can be taken to ease sufferers' pain. Certain treatments and specialists can help people to manage many of the symptoms, such as pain, fatigue, loss of mobility and feeling, depression and muscle spasms. Neurophysiotherapy provision and access to occupational therapists are the single biggest issues to come out of the meetings that were held in the various constituencies and those that I have held subsequently. That includes not only the provision of neurophysiotherapy when MS is first diagnosed but provision during timely interventions throughout key stages of the illness. Currently, there are no neurophysiotherapists in Northern Ireland working exclusively in the area of MS. When we are told that there are 90 physiotherapists with the relevant skills, we know that many of those individuals spend most of their time working in other areas. When asked how many physiotherapists have, at present, a specialised knowledge of MS, the Minister informed me that, in the Belfast Trust the whole-time equivalent is 7·27; in the Northern Trust it is two; in the South Eastern Trust it is 9·4; in the Southern Trust the figure is eight; and in the Western Trust it is 10·22. However, given that we know that many of those individuals do not deal with only MS sufferers, the proportion of experts available for the number of sufferers is very, very low.

We know through evidence that neurophysiotherapy can help to maintain mobility, and, depending on the intensity and delivery of the service, it can even help individuals to gain improvements. It is hugely beneficial and, importantly, can dramatically improve the quality of life of the individuals who receive it.

12.15 pm

A number of MS sufferers responded to a recent survey conducted by the MS Society. One individual said:

"Physio was very helpful and gave me ideas to make me more mobile in the house where I feel safer and less embarrassed".

However, interestingly, another respondent to the survey said:

"Physiotherapy is all very well when you are receiving it but when it stops you go back as far as you have come."

Therefore, it is important that physiotherapy is available to sufferers when the initial diagnosis is made and that follow-up treatment is provided. Indeed, many of the sufferers who I spoke to feel that they are forgotten or left on their own once the initial phase of support has gone.

In other research, the MS Society concluded that only 1% of those surveyed received physiotherapy more than once a week and that fewer than a quarter of individuals with MS could see a physio at least once a week. NICE guidelines stipulate that a neurophysiotherapist should be part of the MS team and, specifically, that those patients with muscle weakness or bowel and bladder problems should have regular physiotherapy. Therefore, when MS sufferers report difficulties in accessing neurophysiotherapists, difficulties in being referred and a general lack of appropriate provision, the whole House should be concerned.

There is also the need to tackle the perception that services are mainly focused in Belfast and that those who live in rural areas in the west of the Province do not have the same access. There are also reports of a shortage of appropriately trained physiotherapists for those with neurological conditions, particularly, MS.

A further concern is that there has been a 30% reduction in beds in the regional neurology inpatient unit at the Royal Victoria Hospital. That reduction means that patients who report

to hospital are placed in general wards, which perhaps do not have specialist expertise. As a result, those patients stay in hospital longer and place a further drain on resources.

Through the motion, we are not suggesting that those with MS should receive continuous physiotherapy but that it should be delivered in a required, time-appropriate way during the transitional stages of the illness. For example, when an individual is first diagnosed, it is important that a physiotherapist is appointed to help with mobility and to teach the sufferer exercises that he or she can do on their own. Again, information suggests that not all GPs are referring individuals immediately to get that early help. Another respondent to the recent MS Society survey said:

"I was never offered physiotherapy from hospital or outpatients. I think that MS patients should be offered this service at times."

There was a common theme among many of the responses to the survey.

Treatment does not have to take place in hospitals. In fact, in many cases, it is better if it does not take place there. Many individuals with MS find it difficult to get to hospital due to problems with getting lifts, using public transport or parking once they get to hospital. It is much better if that level of physiotherapy is delivered in local communities using council facilities, leisure centres and civic centres. Not only is it not delivered in the medicated environment of the hospital, there is a social aspect to it. That is something that we need to look at.

As I said, help is required most when someone is going through the transitional stages of the illness, perhaps when they use a stick for the first time, change their employment patterns or need to use a wheelchair full time. That time-appropriate intervention can make such an important difference to their lives.

I hope that we can have a good, mature debate on the issue today and listen to suggestions from, and the experiences of, Members from across the Province. I also hope that the Minister will give us some real answers to some of the questions that have been posed. I hope that he does not try to turn the debate into a party political slanging match about funding.

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

Mr Ross: We know that he receives half of the Budget, and we want to see those resources targeted in an appropriate fashion. I hope that the House will unite behind the motion, and I look forward to that.

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle, I speak in favour of the motion. I welcome the fact that we are debating this very important topic today, given, as the proposer said, that MS prevalence rates here are the highest in the world.

As the proposer also said, MS is a chronic debilitating neurological disease that is the greatest cause of disability among young adults, with onset typically occurring between 20 and 40 years of age. I want to commend the good work undertaken by the MS Society, which works tirelessly to lobby Members and to provide support and assistance to MS sufferers. A number of sufferers are in the Public Gallery today, and they are all very welcome.

The biggest issue that the MS Society identified in its recent survey was the dire situation as regards neurophysiotherapy provision. The survey made it clear that the role of physiotherapists and other allied health professionals (AHPs) in the treatment of those with MS and other long-term conditions is very under-developed.

The lack of recognition of the role of physiotherapists and other allied health professionals, and the value of the services that they provide for patients with long-term conditions, is, in part, a direct consequence of the absence of a strategy for allied health professionals.

In the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety, we have raised consistently over the past number of years the issue of the under-representation and capacity of allied health professionals at departmental level. I am aware that, sadly, the allied health professional representative at departmental level passed away earlier this year. That has obviously left a gap, but that gap has to be filled. The Department needs to move forward and deliver on its stated commitment to develop a strategy that fully recognises the fact that allied health professionals contribute significantly to improving the health and well-being of those

with long-term conditions. That, in turn, impacts on health and social care costs.

Allied health professionals play a clear role in supporting early discharge from hospital; working across the acute and community interface; delivering integrated services across health and social care; and supporting patients to manage their own conditions, thus preventing admissions to hospital. Allied health professionals provide equipment and adaptations to promote independence, which reduces visits and hospital admissions. They also play a role in assessing patients and, subsequently, in putting multidisciplinary treatment programmes in place. Those interventions enable patients to manage their own conditions and live as independently as possible, which minimises the demands on health and social care services. We all accept the clear advantages of helping people with MS to live the fullest lives possible.

It is accepted that a multidisciplinary approach to managing what is a debilitating disease is the most advantageous way of assisting MS sufferers to have a better quality of life. Sinn Féin fully supports the call for a more consistent strategy. Given that we were promised a review in April, we call on the Department to live up to its commitments. MS sufferers need to hear some positive news from the House today.

Mr Gardiner: The more things change, the more they stay the same. How true that translation of the French saying is of the DUP and its methods, as it sums up the DUP's apparent attitude to our Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety. The DUP demands reviews of spending on specific elements of the Department's delivery. That implies that there is something wrong with that delivery and, in the process, insults the dedicated professionals who work in the Health Service.

Mr Ross: Will the Member give way?

Mr Gardiner: No, thank you.

At the same time, DUP members voted against the ring-fencing of the health budget in Committee. The DUP is perfectly aware of the financial constraints on our local Department, which has faced historical underfunding of £600 million.

Mr Easton: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. The Member mentioned a vote to ring-fence the

health budget. We did not vote against that; it was a different vote. The Member needs to report the facts accurately.

Mr Speaker: The Member has got his remarks on the record. I urge Mr Gardiner to return to the motion that is before the House.

Mr Gardiner: Ring-fencing concerns the Department's general funding rather than any individual or specific funding that comes under its remit.

There we have, perfectly described, the destructive, as opposed to the constructive, approach of the DUP. It would deprive the Minister of money and then criticise how he spends his money. Of course, the DUP cares little for the morale of the Health Service staff that it undermines. It plays politics with the Health Service in a totally cynical and self-serving way. The parties that voted to cut the health budget — namely, the DUP and Sinn Féin — need to reflect on the patients who suffer as a result of those cuts.

Mr Speaker: Order. As Members know, I have some patience. However, I must insist that the Member return to the motion.

Mr Gardiner: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The Minister has been making steady progress on the multiple sclerosis front, as on so many other fronts, in his large and complex Department. In May, he announced a spend of £50,000 to enable the establishment of an MS network. The Minister has also increased investment in disease-modifying therapies. Physiotherapy is an important part of that and is most beneficial to MS sufferers, but disease-modifying therapy through drugs is another important aspect of the treatment.

In March, the Minister announced a short-term working group to examine the neurophysiotherapy service in Northern Ireland and to benchmark it against current NICE guidelines. He also announced that staffing levels would be assessed and that he would consider options for promoting neurophysiotherapy among physiotherapists. Therefore, the review that the DUP is calling for is, in large measure, already taking place.

The Minister has also revealed that all undergraduate physiotherapy students will study neurological conditions, including multiple sclerosis, in the second and third years of their courses, and that specialist development

programmes on neurological conditions, including multiple sclerosis, will be available after they get their qualifications. .

Local initiatives, such as rural lift transport, door-to-door transport and volunteer drivers are also available. The MS Society also provides transport to neurophysiotherapy services. GPs can arrange for ambulance transport, if appropriate; even travel by taxi may be authorised. In addition, for patients who are unable to travel, physiotherapists may be provided in the home or in a care setting.

The picture is one of continual renewal and improvement. That is achieved by hard-working healthcare staff under the equally hard-working Minister. The public know that, and they know exactly what to make of the destructive negativity of the DUP

As Ulster Unionists, we support the Health Minister in all that he is doing to assist people with MS, and we encourage everyone who can help out to do so. I know that the Health Minister will not shrink from his responsibilities to anybody under his Department who needs medical care.

Mr Gallagher: I support the motion, and I thank the DUP Members who brought it to the Floor this morning. For the families of MS patients, and for the patients, the fact is that the MS service is the Cinderella service of the health sector. There are between 3,500 and 4,000 sufferers in Northern Ireland. Indeed, it is a fact that the highest incidence of MS anywhere in the world is here in Northern Ireland.

I will give you an example of how the service is falling down. A patient was referred by their GP to a consultant, and the consultant recommended a course of drugs. However, the patient was told that they would have to wait for the drugs. Indeed, they had to wait for 12 months after being seen by the consultant before the drugs that the consultant recommended were available. I do not understand why that happened. In my view, there is no explanation for that. Therefore, the service is falling down very badly.

Members have pointed out that MS is the biggest cause of disability among young people and that we need a strategy.

That was suggested as far back as 2002, and again in 2009. Indeed, in 2010, the Minister

announced the establishment of a neurology network. However, people out there who deal with this difficult condition daily are not aware of any improvement. We need an update from the Minister on that important neurology network.

12.30 pm

Mr Dallat: Does the Member agree that, as a result of the debate, there must be a new urgency to deliver to MS sufferers those services that have, sadly, been neglected? Does he agree that the debate offers an excellent opportunity to do that?

Mr Speaker: The Member has a minute added on to his time.

Mr Gallagher: I thank my colleague for that contribution. Part of that service includes what has been referred to as a specialist area of physiotherapy, namely neuro-physiotherapy. There is a need for more trained personnel to support people throughout Northern Ireland, particularly in Fermanagh and Tyrone. Although it is welcome that transport is, sometimes, available, we must all remember that they have to travel furthest to Belfast. That presents them with great difficulties due to their mobility problems. It is a worry for their parents.

Of course, sadly, the majority of people who acquire multiple sclerosis are unable to continue to work because proper services are unavailable. They have to drop out of work and spend the rest of their days in their homes. If it were available, physiotherapy could keep some of those people in work, maybe for many more years.

I understand that the cross-border College of Occupational Therapists (COT) is looking at joint initiatives on neurology services. That is to be welcomed. As I have said, access to physiotherapy is a problem in border areas. I hope that the Minister will look again at the North/South feasibility study and, perhaps, reconsider his decision not to make its content available to the Assembly. In border areas, provision of physiotherapy or even, if that is unavailable, provision of exercise groups at community level can make a tremendous difference to easing problems for multiple sclerosis sufferers. Of course, we know that the mental health support that some of them require is not available. That is another instance of when people's names are put on a list and they are told that they will just have to wait until money becomes available.

Occupational therapy services have also been mentioned. There is a definite need for more personnel in that area. Therapists' voices are not being heard sufficiently by the health authorities, in the trusts or in the Department. I urge the Minister to look at that again to ensure that those professionals' voices are heard at the highest level in the Health Service.

I call on the Minister to update us on that network. I hope that the debate helps to give a voice to people who suffer from MS.

Mr McCarthy: As the Alliance Party's health spokesperson, I very much welcome and support the motion. Indeed, I thank the Members who put it on the Order Paper.

Reviewing and improving facilities and treatment for all MS sufferers is most certainly worthy of all Members' support. I have no doubt that all MS patients will support the Assembly's efforts to ensure that their needs are looked after. Every Assembly Member will have constituents who are plagued by the ravages of that disease. Therefore, it is incumbent on all of us to pull out the stops to ensure that improvements are made as soon as possible.

Once again, I thank the Assembly's Research and Library Service for putting together a comprehensive analysis of MS and how it affects many people in the community. It is dreadful to think that Northern Ireland has one of the highest rates of MS in the world, as Mr Gallagher mentioned, and that the numbers are, in fact, rising. Upwards of 4,000 people in this small region suffer from MS. No one seems to know why that should be the case or how to help to reduce the number of patients with MS in Northern Ireland. Given those horrible statistics, it is the duty of our Health Service to provide help in every way possible to make the life of a patient as comfortable and rewarding as possible.

I have no doubt that the reason for bringing the motion to the House is to raise the profile of MS and the hopes of MS patients that things can only get better. I am glad that our Health Minister, Michael McGimpsey, is with us today to hear Members from different constituencies relate how MS sufferers want to see more and better provision to enable them to have a half-decent life.

I pay tribute to the volunteers and carers out in our community who work so hard through their

local branches of the Multiple Sclerosis Society to bring help and comfort to the patients. It is also worth recording the number of Members who have asked questions of the Minister on what provisions his Department is offering for MS patients. That indicates a growing concern about the plight of people suffering from MS across Northern Ireland.

I was horrified to hear recently that the Belfast Trust, in its wisdom or otherwise, decided to cut its inpatient neurology unit at the Royal Victoria Hospital by some 30%. I understand that that was done without consultation with any of the local consultants. Despite what managers say, that will have a detrimental effect, not only on MS patients but on sufferers of other neurological disorders.

The information to hand indicates that there are no designated MS physiotherapy services available in Northern Ireland, as has been said, and most of the evidence, through correspondence, suggests that MS patients regard physiotherapy as a number one priority. Surely that anomaly will show up in any review. Action must be taken to put that right as soon as possible. If we know that to be the case, let the Minister take action immediately for the benefit of all MS patients.

The Research and Library Service has provided us with a very detailed document entitled 'Multiple Sclerosis: National clinical guideline for diagnosis and management in primary and secondary care'. Contained in that document is a wide range of analysis of MS, its remedies and some 25 recommendations. The document had input from the Royal College of Physicians and the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy. Surely they are the experts, and their recommendations, along with the Department's national service framework for long-term conditions, should be the basis on which progress can be made at a local Northern Ireland level.

It is important that the Assembly acknowledges the plight in which MS patients find themselves, and we call on the Department and the Minister to help to ease the pain of the patients.

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

Mr McCarthy: That can be done by providing the necessary drugs, rehabilitation and support at every level, and by working with the Multiple

Sclerosis Society to reduce the pain and suffering of all MS patients.

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Mr Easton: I support the motion, and I thank my colleagues for bringing it forward. Multiple sclerosis is a disease caused by inflammation around the brain and spinal cord. It affects the ability of nerve cells in the brain and spine to communicate with each other. Multiple sclerosis is most likely caused by a combination of genetic, environmental and infectious factors. However, its exact cause has not been identified. Relatives, usually siblings, of a person with the disease are more likely to contact it. It is difficult to diagnose, given that the symptoms can be similar to other medical problems. There is no known cure for MS. Management through treatment and therapy have proven useful and helpful. That may involve drugs and physiotherapy.

Mr Moutray: I thank my colleague for giving way. He referred to treatments and therapies. Does he agree that one beneficial treatment for users with multiple sclerosis has been found to be an oxygen chamber? Within the Southern Trust area, there is an oxygen chamber in Craigavon Area Hospital, but sufferers are denied the use of it. Does my colleague agree that that should be made available for sufferers?

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

Mr Easton: I thank my colleague for that intervention. An oxygen chamber has proven beneficial, and I am surprised to hear that the Southern Trust is not taking advantage of the chamber in Craigavon Area Hospital. I ask the Minister to take note of the lack of use of that chamber and perhaps to get in contact with the Southern Trust to see whether something can be done to alleviate the suffering of those with MS through the use of that chamber.

Treatment may also involve drugs and physiotherapy. Information about the patient's condition is also vital. Prognosis for a person with MS is very much dependent on the subtype of the disease, as well as the person's age, sex and initial symptoms. The disease advances and evolves over the decades of a person's life. Life expectancy is five to 10 years lower than the average for an unaffected person. Most sufferers lose the ability to walk when the disease is at an advanced stage. Sadly, suicide

represents a high risk among those with MS, as has been highlighted in much of the debate about euthanasia here.

MS is diagnosed in 3.5 to 6.6 people per 100,000 of the population in Northern Ireland each year. Prevalence is between 100 and 120 people per 100,000 of the population. Given that the disease is quite rare, problems in our Health Service relate to the availability of access to expert services. A published report by the National Collaborating Centre for Chronic Conditions argued that specialist neurological and neurological rehabilitation services should be made available to every person with MS when they need them.

Although we have services available for MS sufferers in Northern Ireland, problems have been highlighted with regard to access to physiotherapy and specialist neurological assistance. According to an MS Society report published in 2009, only 13% of those with MS have physiotherapy. Patients experience difficulty accessing a physiotherapist, difficulty being referred, and a lack of provision when they have received a referral to someone who understands their condition. There is, therefore, a need to specialise review services and the treatment available for MS sufferers, as the motion calls for.

The low availability of services is also restricting access to care and treatment for MS sufferers, especially with no dedicated team or unit to help people with MS. MS patients usually access treatment through the same channels as anyone else with a similar but different medical condition. However, on diagnosis, patients usually have access to a specialist MS nurse.

Northern Ireland has one of the highest and rising prevalence rates of MS in the world, with approximately 3,500 to 4,000 people with MS in Northern Ireland. That figure is staggering, given that we have a population of only 1.7 million. It is up to us to provide the best care and support for MS sufferers throughout their lives. I, therefore, support the motion and commend it to the House.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I support the motion, which is timely and welcome. We are debating a serious condition, and I do not think that MS sufferers or those from the MS Society came here today to listen to inter-party bickering about budgets that have not even been decided yet.

Mr Ross: I thank the Member for giving way. Nobody will question the fact that there is no love lost between our two parties, but will the Member join me and express his disgust at the comments of Sammy Gardiner when he questioned the motivation behind the debate?

Mr Brady: I thank the Member for his intervention, but I reiterate what I said; this is a serious subject, and it should not be used as some sort of political football.

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

Mr Brady: As has been stated, here in the North, we have some of the highest statistics of people suffering from MS in the world. In my constituency of Newry and Armagh, there is a very high incidence of MS. Approximately 25 years ago, the Mayo Clinic in America carried out an in-depth study on MS, which stated that we had among the highest rates of MS in the world. I have some personal experience of the effects of MS, as my brother suffered from the condition for a number of years until his death in 1998. Ironically enough, when he was first diagnosed, they thought that it was a brain tumour, and the diagnosis of MS came as almost a relief, with us obviously not knowing the full impact of the condition and how it was going to impact on him.

12.45 pm

MS is a condition that, obviously, affects the patient, but also has a widespread effect on the immediate family. It is a condition that can eventually lead to a very poor quality of life, with a person requiring a great deal of care and palliative treatment. In my experience and opinion, the services provided by the Health Department to MS sufferers are on an almost ad hoc basis. Treatment needs to be proactive, not reactive. Some of the most effective drugs, which can be very beneficial for some sufferers, are not always made readily available. Thought needs to be given to, and a proper strategy developed for, the continuing and most effective treatment of MS. There has to be a uniform approach to the services provided for MS and the alleviation of its attendant problems.

I attended a meeting at Newry arts centre in March this year that was facilitated by the Newry branch of the MS Society. I pay tribute to the MS Society in Newry, some of whose members are in the Public Gallery, which continues to

do such a valuable and fantastic job in dealing with, promoting awareness of, and helping with all the problems around MS. One issue raised at the meeting and which has been mentioned in the debate is how beneficial physiotherapy is in helping to alleviate some of the symptoms encountered by patients with MS.

However MS affects someone, it is clear that appropriate exercise can make a difference to managing and living with the condition. Physiotherapy can be very beneficial for people with milder symptoms and those more severely affected. It can help people to manage symptoms such as fatigue, muscle stiffness, balance difficulties, anxiety, depression, and bladder and bowel problems. Due to the difficulties of accessing physiotherapy, a lot of people who benefit initially from the service find that, as time goes on, it becomes less and less available because of longer waiting lists, etc. The Minister has to ensure that adequate services are provided for MS sufferers, particularly in areas such as physiotherapy, which can be of such benefit.

Each trust seems to do its own thing; surely there should be some liaison when determining the provision of such important services. Although MS is a progressive condition, it is clear that early intervention and the proper provision of drug regimes and services are essential to maintaining and improving the quality of life for MS sufferers. Go raibh míle maith agat.

Mr G Robinson: On 1 October 2010, the Belfast Trust closed one third of the neurology beds in the Royal Victoria Hospital. On 28 September 2010, I asked the Minister what action he intended to take to protect specialised neurological services. His reply was:

"The Health and Social Care Board is responsible for the commissioning of services to meet the needs of the population, including specialised neurological services. The Board will therefore consider any proposed changes to the provision of these services in that context."

The provision of adequate services should be your responsibility, Minister. I am in no way trying to politicise this very important medical debate, but we must all accept that we are, hopefully, trying to make life more tolerable for the sufferers of MS and their families.

The national service framework states that its aims include making services person-centred,

better co-ordinated, easier to use and provided by people with knowledge and experience of specific conditions. Not in the Northern Ireland Health Service, though: we will make you wait longer to access the treatment and care that you need because we have shut specialist neurology beds.

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

MS impacts on an entire family, not just the sufferer, and it is very important that treatment and access to professional help is a matter of urgency. The £50,000 made available to boost neurophysiotherapy earlier this year was welcome and, with the removal of bed space, will be all the more important. However, I am somewhat sceptical that that will be the reality. There is already a shortage of neurophysiotherapists. Now, when someone is diagnosed with MS, I fear that access to the treatment that is so vital to them and their family will be delayed due to a reduction in beds and a shortage of specialist services.

Although MS is a condition that may give sufferers better spells, we must always be aware that the most important thing is to ensure the best possible quality of life for the patient. The cuts and shortages that I have already outlined will not assist in achieving that. Budget cuts are a reality, but do we, as an Assembly, really believe that abandoning MS sufferers to longer waiting lists and delayed access to vital services, and, therefore, a poorer quality of life, is the way forward?

I pay tribute to all the wonderful and dedicated medical staff who look after MS sufferers. I support the motion.

Rev Dr Robert Coulter: I am grateful for the privilege of speaking in this important debate, and I thank the Members who tabled the motion.

MS is undoubtedly a distressing illness for those whom it affects and their families. When we lose sight of that and of the people who are suffering, we have lost the core of the debate.

For thousands of sufferers in the UK, including, as we have heard, an estimated 4,000 in Northern Ireland, MS has become a part of their everyday lives. Owing to its debilitating nature, the disease can have a detrimental impact not only on sufferers, but on their families, especially those with young children.

The nature of the disease and the manner in which it affects the body's central nervous system means that the effort of loved ones to assist in the alleviation of suffering is one that we must acknowledge. Until a cure is found, we should make the provision of adequate MS services a priority.

In the past century, the advances that have been made in the field of medical science have been truly remarkable. Yet, for all the success, the threat posed by multiple sclerosis is still very real. There is no cure, and even those who are diagnosed with mild, relapsing or remitting forms of the disease live with the threat of developing more progressive forms of it later in life.

It is important to recognise the efforts that have been made thus far by the Health Minister to address the four key areas of MS treatment: the causes, the cures, the symptoms and the services. Whether it is a £50,000 investment to form an MS network or the creation of an allied health strategy, the Minister remains committed to tackling the threat that MS poses.

No one in Northern Ireland has to wait longer than 13 weeks from the point of their referral to the time of their first round of treatment, a timescale that the Minister is seeking to reduce further. Those who live in rural communities without access to the larger hospitals are assisted with transport as well as with home help and physiotherapy, even though those support services are sometimes not entirely adequate. Last year, a new MS-specialised clinic opened in Craigavon Area Hospital.

The Minister is also committed to reducing waste and has targeted savings of £88 million through the use of generic drugs as opposed to brand names. However, more can always be done. I am particularly aware of the issues that surround neurophysiotherapy and the difficulties in accessing it in Northern Ireland.

However, addressing those difficulties requires resources in health; resources that have been cut by parties in this House on three occasions in the past 18 months. That is why it is even more important that health is not prioritised after the CSR.

In a debate, it is so easy to call for more funding for something without saying what will be cut to provide that funding. If the Minister made additional major investment in the facilities for and treatment of people with MS, he would,

first, have to withdraw funding from some other part of the Health Service. I wonder which area those who call for more support would suggest.

When dealing with services such as the treatment of MS, our co-operation with charitable organisations, such as the Multiple Sclerosis Society Northern Ireland and Action MS, continues to be invaluable. The role that those groups play in our society is crucial. It is also important to note the role that our universities play. The University of Ulster currently runs an important project to evaluate the effect of group exercise therapy.

The fight against multiple sclerosis will be long and arduous. However, with a firm commitment, the necessary economic assistance and co-operation at local, national and international levels, and in the Assembly, we can make a difference in alleviating the suffering of those living with the disease. I support the motion.

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Mr McGimpsey): I welcome the opportunity to outline the actions that my Department is taking to sustain and to improve services for people suffering multiple sclerosis and other complex neurological problems.

There is no doubt that multiple sclerosis, or MS as it is commonly known, can be a devastating disease. Some 3,500 people are living with MS in Northern Ireland, and, therefore, some 3,500 families are living with the impact of that disease. For some people, this can be a relatively mild disease that progresses slowly; others have rapidly advancing disease that affects their health, mobility, employment and family circumstances. Services for MS patients are provided within neurology services, along with other conditions such as Parkinson's, Huntington's and motor neuron diseases.

I am committed to the care of MS patients and to improving the nature of the services available to them. During my time as Health Minister, I have improved services for people with MS, invested in new treatments and ensured that in future we will maximise the effectiveness of their care. I have done all that in a financial climate that requires me to prioritise. Hospital expenditure on MS services falls within neurology. The spend on neurology, including expenditure on high-cost drugs, increased from £13.3 million in 2007-08 to £15.3 million last year.

I have also put in place a wide range of strategic measures that will improve services for those with MS and other complex neurological conditions. I have asked for the establishment of a neurological practitioners' network, which will meet formally before Christmas this year. It will help to ensure a uniform and co-ordinated approach to the supportive care, particularly physiotherapy, that is so essential for those suffering from MS and other neurological conditions. The detail of that network, its role and remit have been discussed with the Multiple Sclerosis Society and other key stakeholders. I recognise the fact that there are concerns about the number of neuro-physiotherapists in Northern Ireland. The network will help to improve access to neuro-physiotherapy and specialist nursing. It will do so by exploring different models of service delivery and improving arrangements. That will make a difference to those who use services.

My officials are working up standards for the management of long-term conditions including MS. They will help to achieve consistency in the treatment and care of patients and in the care of their families. They will also serve to promote good communication and collaborative working. I am pleased that the Long Term Condition Alliance Northern Ireland, which includes the Multiple Sclerosis Society, is closely engaged in the work, and I welcome its ongoing input and commitment.

The needs of those with a physical or sensory disability can be complex, and we must ensure that those needs are addressed. To that end, my Department is developing a strategy on physical and sensory disability. Allied health professionals, including physiotherapists, occupational therapists and speech and language therapists, play a key role in working with people with complex neurological disorders. That group is currently working with officials from my Department to produce a strategy for AHP services; that will help to ensure that they are developed in a manner that best meets patients' needs. A carers' strategy has also been published on this matter; in that, my Department worked in partnership with DSD colleagues to set out what needs to be done to support carers across Northern Ireland. Health and social care services provided for people with MS are tailored to individual needs.

If an individual develops symptoms, GPs are often the first point of contact. That will be

followed by a referral to a consultant neurologist for a specialist opinion, if appropriate. We have a very responsive neurology service that has 16 highly skilled and experienced consultants who are supported by nursing and allied health professional staff and other staff. Neurology clinics are held in 13 of our hospitals. That ensures that clinics are accessible across Northern Ireland.

1.00 pm

Neurology beds in the Royal Victoria Hospital were referred to. Neurology services are in the process of being modernised in the Belfast Trust. Although that will not affect beds in the Mater or City Hospitals, there will be a reduction of seven beds on the ward in the Royal Hospital. Those will be replaced by four ultra acute stroke beds. Therefore, that specialisation is happening in that trust area, and the Belfast Trust has assured me that it will improve, not reduce, service.

Waiting times for a neurology outpatient appointment have improved enormously in recent years. Currently, the vast majority of people are seen within nine weeks of a GP referral being made. As of June this year, the latest quarterly figures for waiting times showed that 2,385 patients out of a total of 3,047 were seen within the nine-week target. Those requiring an urgent opinion because of clinical priority can be seen more quickly.

The neurology service includes a regional component based at the Belfast Trust that provides quality care for MS sufferers and others with serious neurological conditions such as Parkinson's disease and motor neuron disease. It also provides acute stroke care. The input of specialised neurology care is critical and plays a major role in determining whether an individual is likely to benefit from specialist drug therapies.

We spend approximately £8.5 million a year on specialist drugs for MS. That approximates to between £6,000 and £10,000 for each patient a year. I must emphasise that people in Northern Ireland have excellent access to those medications. It was originally estimated that around 12% to 15% of people with MS would be eligible for treatment with disease-modifying therapies. At the end of August 2010, some 1,123 people were on treatment, which approximates to 27% of people with MS in Northern Ireland. It is important to note that not

everyone with MS will benefit from specialist drug therapy. The available drugs include beta interferon, and other new drugs are expected to be available in due course. Those are progressing through the European Medicines Agency's licensing process. In the UK, it is expected that the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence will consider the clinical and cost-effectiveness of those drugs.

I have put robust arrangements in place to minimise the time that people with MS need to wait before starting treatment. Currently, people should not wait longer than 13 weeks to start treatment. As of 31 August 2010, 37 people were waiting to start treatment, and none of them were waiting for longer than 13 weeks. Tommy Gallagher needs to write to me or speak to me about the instance that he cited of someone waiting for one year for treatment, because that example is certainly not representative of any sort of planned response.

My actions in improving timeliness and access to services are clear. My action to ensure that people with MS have rapid access to necessary drug treatments is clear, and my action in establishing a neurological practitioners' network to improve multidisciplinary working is clear. My plans to bring forward further work in neurology and AHP services, long-term conditions and physical and sensory disability are clear evidence of my commitment to the care of people with MS and other complex neurological conditions.

Members have asked that I review and improve facilities for people with MS. I think that I am demonstrating that I am doing so and that I am continuing to do so on a routine basis. The limitations that I face will depend on the outcome of the upcoming Budget. Mickey Brady says that the Budget has not been settled. I say to him that I am working on a current budget and that my budget has been cut three times in-year. It is simply impossible for me to improve and enhance health and social care across Northern Ireland unless I am provided with the necessary resources to do so.

Activity is in direct proportion to the funding that is available. If funding reduces, so does activity. As I have said over and over again, the health budget is too essential to cut. Without the right levels of funding, people will be left in pain and distress. The public have asked for the health budget to be protected. I continue to support

that call, and I ask that everyone in the House do the same. The Multiple Sclerosis Society, which is lobbying today, reinforces the need for the health budget to be protected.

Mr I McCrea: I thank the Minister and all Members for their contributions. I am not sure that every contribution was valuable, but I will come to that later. The first part of what I intend to say will be in a personal capacity.

As elected representatives, we have many people come to our constituency offices to convey concerns about accessing healthcare. On occasion, the Minister gets letters from me on behalf of my constituents, and I thank him for his responses. We do not get success every time, but at least we get movement. I want to achieve the best access to healthcare for my constituents. I will certainly do what I can to deliver for them.

Northern Ireland has one of the highest and rising prevalence rates of multiple sclerosis in the world, which is a startling statistic for a population of only 1.7 million. A number of other Members referred to that figure. There are approximately 3,500 to 4,000 people with MS who live in Northern Ireland. MS is a debilitating neurological disease that is the greatest cause of disability, certainly among young adults, with the typical age of onset being between 20 and 40. Symptoms may vary among sufferers. They can be relapsing and remitting, but they are progressive. MS sufferers can live a full life, but given the fact that the disease is progressive, it affects their ability at times to do normal things. Therefore, MS sufferers need all the care and support that we can offer. At present, access to services for them is somewhat limited.

I again thank the Minister for responding to the debate. He set out the actions that he has taken, and that is to be welcomed. However, I refer to access to physiotherapists with specialist expertise and knowledge of the disease. An MS Society report that was published in 2009 stated that only 13% of those with MS in Northern Ireland were receiving physiotherapy. Patients report difficulties with accessing physiotherapy and being referred, as well as a lack of appropriate physio provision with those who are knowledgeable about multiple sclerosis.

As other Members indicated, there are currently no dedicated MS physiotherapists in Northern Ireland. Evidence has demonstrated that physiotherapy can help with balance, mobility,

bladder and bowel function, pain and fatigue, all of which are symptoms of MS. It has been indicated that physiotherapy helps patients to gain improvement for up to nine to 12 months, depending on the mode of delivery and the intensity of the programme. That is why MS sufferers must have access to dedicated services and to dedicated health professionals who specialise in MS.

I also draw Members' attention to the problems that MS sufferers have in accessing treatment and attending scheduled appointments. As Members will be aware, my constituency of Mid Ulster is very rural. It lacks transport networks, which limits the ability of MS sufferers, among others, to access care and treatment. Appointments for MS sufferers are generally in Belfast, which is some distance away, and that creates an obstacle. How can they get there when public transport links are so poor? On many occasions, they have to rely on a family member or a friend to take them to their appointment. The journey is long and can be uncomfortable, and, by the time they get home, whatever treatment they received in Belfast may prove to have been pointless. I suggest bringing treatment and care to MS sufferers. Why could local council buildings or, indeed, MS sufferers' homes not be used to deliver treatment? MS sufferers must be treated with care, enthusiasm and dedication. However, although that happens already, there is certainly room for improvement. I and every other Member believe that it is the patient who counts.

I shall now respond to Members' contributions. My colleague Alastair Ross opened the debate, and there was nothing in his remarks or in the motion that is in any way political or that attacks any Member or Minister. Michelle O'Neill referred to the fact that the Department has no MS strategy and that it needs to be more forward-thinking. The Minister has to take those comments on board. Sam Gardiner was next. To be honest, I was absolutely appalled by his comments. He should hang his head in shame, because he used the majority of his time to have a swipe at my party. As I said, there was nothing of a political nature in the motion. His attacks were uncalled for, and I have no doubt that that fact will not be lost on the wider community, who will share my disgust at the way in which he used his time in such an important debate.

Like other Members, Tommy Gallagher, who is no longer in his place, referred to those who

suffer from MS. He also stated that certain drugs are not available, the service is falling down, and there is a need for physiotherapy in homes. Kieran McCarthy referred to the same figures as other Members did, and he mentioned the fact that there are no designated physio services and that action must be taken as soon as possible to put that right. My colleague Alex Easton said that specialist services must be made available to MS sufferers. Mr Brady mentioned issues that affect patients, their family circle and the wider community. He said that treatment needs to be proactive and not reactive, and I share that view. In addition, he mentioned early intervention, which is an important aspect of treatment. George Robinson referred to the closure of beds at the Royal Victoria Hospital. The Minister responded to that point, so if the Member sees fit to do so, I will allow him to take the matter up with the Minister.

I welcome the majority of Dr Coulter's comments, which, as usual, were well made. I often take Dr Coulter's comments on board, because he has a wide range of knowledge on many issues. Although he recognised the Minister's efforts to do his bit, he suggested making the provision of care a priority. Few on these, or on other, Benches would question the commitment of any Minister, but that is not to say that they could not do more; there is plenty of room for improvement.

1.15 pm

Although I welcome many of the Minister's comments, he said in his closing remarks that he would take money out of his budget to do other things. That is an important issue, but —

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

Mr I McCrea: If the Health Minister wants to ring-fence money for health, from which Departments should funding be taken? I welcome everyone's commitment and the Minister's attendance and response. I hope that the House will not divide on the issue.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to review and improve the facilities available to, and treatment for, people who are suffering from multiple sclerosis.

Vesting Land: Protecting Homeowners

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has allowed up to one hour and 30 minutes for the debate. The proposer will have 10 minutes to propose the motion and 10 minutes in which to make a winding-up speech. One amendment has been selected and published on the Marshalled List. The proposer of the amendment will have 10 minutes to propose the amendment and five minutes in which to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who wish to speak will have five minutes.

Ms Ní Chuilín: I beg to move

That this Assembly calls on the Minister for Social Development and the Minister of Finance and Personnel to bring forward, within the lifetime of the current Assembly, proposals to ensure that homeowners living in areas that are due to be redeveloped by the Department for Social Development will be protected from negative equity and increased debt following the vesting of land.

Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I wish to thank the Business Committee for selecting the motion and the Assembly Research and Library Service for providing information. In particular, however, I wish to thank the people of the Village, Carrick Hill, New Lodge and Parkside areas for their invaluable insight and their direct experience.

The motion calls for proposals to be brought forward in the lifetime of the Assembly. I am slightly disappointed by the SDLP amendment, which, in my view, weakens the motion. For example, it asks for:

"proposals which seek to address or mitigate against homeowners".

Our motion calls for:

"proposals to ensure that homeowners living in areas that are due to be redeveloped ... will be protected".

However, I appreciate the sentiment behind the amendment. If I read it correctly, its intent is to make sure that people, regardless of where they live, are not unduly disadvantaged as a result of any vesting procedure. If that is the sentiment and tone of the SDLP's contribution to the debate, I understand it, even though we cannot compare like with like. Nevertheless, it is the prerogative of a political party to table an amendment.

I will return to the motion. For well over a decade, residents of the Village area of south Belfast, and Carrick Hill, the upper long streets, Parkside and the Glen, to name but a few areas in north Belfast, have been campaigning for full redevelopment and urban regeneration schemes. My colleague Alex Maskey, who offers his apologies for not being here today because he is attending a funeral, has been one of the champions of full development of the Village area of south Belfast, which, as we all know, was vested in April this year. It is estimated that 52 people from the Village area face negative equity; more than a dozen residents of the upper long streets in the New Lodge are in the same situation. Unfortunately, I am confident that that figure will increase by the time vesting occurs.

I have no doubt that, over the months ahead, we will hear many legal — and quasi-legal — arguments using examples concerning different articles and sections of the law. We will hear a great deal about whether loss for homeowners is a direct consequence of vesting or simply bad luck because of the failure of market forces. Either way, I appeal to Members who are tempted to quote various articles and sections of the law to take a wee pause. I ask Members not to confuse the law with justice.

For decades, under the right-to-buy scheme, many tenants bought their homes from the Housing Executive or housing associations. They did so for different reasons: some wanted security for their families, while others felt that there was very little difference between the money that they were paying in rent and the money that they paid for a mortgage. That policy, regardless of its popularity, meant that the housing stock available for social housing decreased.

I ask the Department to investigate some proposals, and I have two examples from some research that we have done. The Minister made remarks as recently as last week on the golden share scheme. The scheme will mean that, if they wish to move back into an area following redevelopment, homeowners will be allowed to invest whatever money they made from the compulsory purchase order into one of the new homes, as long as they had previously been a resident for 12 months. The shortfall will not have to be paid back, because the housing association will hold on to that as a golden share. Therefore, the property will effectively be co-owned by the resident and the housing association. That is my understanding of the

scheme, but if I have got it wrong, I look forward to clarification from the Minister.

However, if that or something similar is the case, issues around maintenance and the percentage of share for the resident will need to be clarified. The scheme will also affect people who are on the housing waiting list because — I admit that I read the proposal very quickly — it will mean that those who avail themselves of the golden share will almost certainly have first pick of the social housing stock. That needs to be managed and explained.

I looked at schemes that have taken effect across the water, such as the one through the Seedley and Langworthy Trust in Salford in greater Manchester, as well as others in Scotland. The greater Manchester scheme seems to have been successful, having won an award in 2006 from the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors. That scheme was funded through a single regeneration budget.

The proposal for the golden share scheme seems to be fairly straightforward and does not require any new legislation. There will be additional legal arguments to be made, and the purpose of today's motion is to draw out ideas on top of the two examples that I cited.

There is concern about the golden share scheme among residents. I can speak only for the residents of the upper long streets, whom I met last week about the matter. There is talk among them that it is almost like giving away a piece of security that they had hoped to pass on to their families. I appreciate that much of this is governed by market value and is under the remit of Land and Property Services (LPS), which, in turn, is under the remit of the Department of Finance and Personnel. However, regardless of what proposals are introduced, our party is asking that what is considered are innovative approaches, precedents elsewhere, what schemes worked and what schemes did not work, with a view to introducing a scheme.

The Minister is well aware — I am sure that other Members are, too, particularly those who represent the constituency — of the issues in South Belfast. I will not get into those issues, because a tribunal is under way at the minute. However, I will give an example from North Belfast. The community in the New Lodge is situated beside that in Tigers Bay, where houses historically have received lower valuations than those in the New Lodge. For example, a house

in Tigers Bay that is similar to one in the New Lodge is currently valued at £40,000 less. That is setting the tone and is, as the Minister will appreciate, causing a great deal of concern.

One of the families that I was working with on Friday evening bought a house a couple of years ago — probably at the height of the market — for £154,000. The family has now been offered £70,000 for it. That is a massive drop. In fairness to that young couple, they do not anticipate the waving of a magic wand, but they are saying that the gap is far too big for them to bridge and will mean that they will not be able to move to somewhere of their choosing, if they can move at all. The onus is on elected representatives here, in conjunction with the two responsible Departments, to look at what is out there and try to introduce proposals.

The other example, and the other side of the coin, is that, when I spoke to some of the residents from the Village area a few weeks ago, they said that, at the height of the market, houses in the city centre and its outskirts were anticipated to be worth anything from £180,000 to £200,000. However, when it came to working-class Protestant areas, the value dropped. There is something wrong with the way that the market values of properties in both constituencies are calculated. By and large, both constituencies are made up of working-class, low-income families, who have worked and done their best to provide homes.

The Village urban renewal area (URA) scheme is more advanced than the URA schemes in my constituency. Nevertheless, if any lessons can be learnt from that, it is incumbent on us not to make mistakes that can be avoided on any pending URA scheme. It was with that in mind that Sinn Féin proposed the motion.

On a technical point and a small point of principle, I do not believe that the amendment is like for like. I accept that the SDLP's intentions in tabling the amendment were to ensure that people, regardless of where they live, are not disadvantaged as a result of any vesting procedures. To that end, Sinn Féin will accept the amendment. Although we disagree with it, we will certainly not divide the House on the matter. We ask the House to unite in support of people whose homes will be vested and who, on some occasions, will face huge negative equity. I ask the House to support the motion.

Mr O'Loan: I beg to move the following amendment: Leave out all after "calls on" and insert

"the Minister of Finance and Personnel, in conjunction with Executive colleagues, to bring forward, within the lifetime of the current Assembly, proposals which seek to address or mitigate against homeowners, farm owners and land owners, living in areas that are due to be redeveloped by the Department for Social Development, the Department for Regional Development or any other Department, being unduly affected by negative equity and increased debt following the vesting of land or property."

1.30 pm

I appreciate the sentiments of the proposer of the motion and the manner in which she has spoken. I express myself in similar terms. I welcome the motion. It addresses an important issue that needs attention. Hopefully, a practical solution can be found to the problem. The SDLP's point in proposing the amendment is to indicate that the problem is situated more broadly and is not exclusive to the Department for Social Development (DSD). Also, any remedy is more likely to be found in the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP), rather than exclusively in the Department for Social Development. I respect the fact that the motion refers to the Department of Finance and Personnel, but the SDLP's amendment is broader and more specific. I welcome the fact that the proposer of the motion said that she accepts the amendment.

I will start by referring to what the Department of Finance and Personnel says on the issue, as it is important to put that on the record. The introductory paragraphs of the Department's 'Compulsory Purchase and Compensation: A Guide to Compensation for Residential Owners and Occupiers' are very clear. With regard to market value, paragraph 2.10 states:

"The value is based upon what the land might be expected to realise if sold in the open market by a willing seller."

With regard to compensation, paragraph 2.19 states:

"When compensation is settled the outstanding loan from the mortgagee (usually a bank or a building society) is paid off and the mortgage is redeemed."

Paragraph 2.20 states:

"There may be circumstances where the outstanding loan on the mortgage exceeds the value of the property. This may arise, for example, where arrears have built up or where there is 'negative equity' as a result of falling values."

Paragraph 2.21 states:

"In these circumstances the value of the property being acquired is agreed between the acquiring authority, the lender and the borrower. If the value of the property is less than the outstanding debt on the mortgage there will be no compensation payable to the borrower."

Paragraph 2.22 states:

"The mortgagee will, firstly, receive payment of the principal sum outstanding including any arrears and interest due and, secondly, will retain the right to recover the outstanding sum and any interest due thereon from the borrower."

Those terms are very clear. Government have recognised the issue of negative equity: it is not an entirely new consideration as the result of today's motion. However, so far, DFP has not put forward a substantial remedy to address the matter.

The Department for Social Development has issued a consultation document entitled 'Policy to Support Owner Occupiers in Redevelopment Areas'.

The document refers at the outset to the existing measure that offers compensation over and above the ordinary market value: the home loss payment. A home loss payment equates to 10% of the market value of the existing property, with, as I understand it, a minimum of £4,500, and that is paid to owner-occupiers. I assume that the wording is deliberately chosen and that the payment is not, therefore, payable to landlords. However, it recognises the significant issue that arises in that situation. There is also a disturbance allowance, which I think is of the order of £1,500 or £1,600, but it relates solely to disturbance and probably should not be thought of in any sense as compensation for the issue that we are talking about today.

The consultation document recognises that, when compensation is paid, it can often fall short of allowing displaced owner-occupiers to buy into the new housing put back into their old community. The document puts forward some proposals to allow owner-occupiers to remain

in the community. We should never forget that housing is about people and communities; we do not want to rebuild at the cost of damaging existing communities.

Two measures are proposed in the consultation document, which was issued in July 2010, one of which is early buyout. It is already the case that owner-occupiers have the opportunity to be rehoused as social tenants. Under the ordinary rules, they have to wait five years before becoming eligible to buy their home. Under this proposal, they would be able to avail themselves of the house sale scheme immediately, with the same rights as other tenants. That seems like a very constructive proposition. Option two is a shared equity proposal that would give owner-occupiers the opportunity to purchase a new home in the community after regeneration, with any difference between the values of the old home and the new home held by the housing association that is putting back the new housing. Again, that is a very constructive step, and I am sure that parties here will respond to the consultation favourably.

I want to make some specific remarks about the Village area. I recognise that there are Members who know more about the detail of the area than I do, but I think that we would all be on common ground in saying that we very much support the scheme. It is a massive regeneration scheme, and a very necessary one. When Margaret Ritchie became Minister for Social Development, one of the first things that she did and was asked to do was visit the houses in that area, and she was shocked by what she saw. Margaret Ritchie was a Minister who acts, and, indeed, we now have a Minister who will also continue to act. Members will have seen that already and would, I think, give testimony to that effect.

The regeneration project is worth some £100 million. There are 500 old homes, many of which are unfit for further occupation, which will be demolished and replaced by 273 new homes built to the latest design and environmental standards. There will be massive improvements, and a number of other homes will be refurbished.

Talking in broad terms — I will come back to one or two more specific points about the Village area in a moment — I will address the reasons for the SDLP amendment. Other Departments are significantly affected by the issue of vesting of land, in particular, the Department for

Regional Development (DRD). Members have asked questions in the Assembly, and there has been significant press reportage, around the vesting of land for roads development — the A5, the A2 and, in my constituency, the A26, so it is not solely in relation to DSD that those matters arise. The issue can only really be dealt with and addressed by the Department of Finance and Personnel, because it sets the rules for purchasing and vesting, some of which I read out, and other Departments have to follow them.

Negative equity is not a new issue. Not everyone who suffers from negative equity can be compensated, but the particular issue in this case is that people are forced to sell their homes, which makes it a genuine issue for government. Even when people are affected by negative equity, most can ride out the market cycle, but that does not apply in this case. However, we should recognise that they are not the only people who are affected in that way. Sometimes something as simple as a change of job or a change in personal or family circumstances can mean that people are damaged by negative equity. Sometimes no rescue plan is available.

We do not think that is possible to fully protect people from negative equity, but there is an onus on government to look at the situation to see whether something can be done to mitigate its impact. We look to the Department of Finance and Personnel to consider what might be done. It is up to it what that might be, but interest-free loans or grants might come in to the equation.

Only a relatively small proportion of house owners in the Village area will be affected by negative equity. Many of them are long-established residents, and only people who bought at the height of the housing boom are hitting problems. Since 2007, market prices have dropped by 40%, so anyone who bought around then faces a significant problem. The vast majority of households are not in negative equity. Furthermore, a substantial proportion of the people who are in negative equity are not resident in the property but are investors. They are persons who bought to let. Anna Lo, in some of her questioning on the matter, referred specifically to the issue of landlords. Although we might also have some sympathy with investors, our particular sympathy is with owner-occupiers.

There is a genuine issue to address, and the Department for Social Development has proposed significant initiatives to which I have referred and which I hope will come to fruition. The main potential for solving and addressing the issue rests with the Department of Finance and Personnel. When the outcome of the debate is brought before that Department, I hope that it will find a positive way of acting.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development (Mr Hamilton):

I will juggle my time between commenting as Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development and, latterly, as a DUP representative. The Committee has not spent a lot of time looking at the issue, so there is no Committee view to express. However, I will endeavour as far as I can to give an outline of what the Committee has done where it has delved into the issue and to report on the views that we have heard, if not taken, on the matter.

The motion appears to refer to the vesting of homes, whereas the amendment refers to the vesting of land and farms as well. I will talk about the latter first. The Committee has previously considered vesting by the Department for Social Development in relation to urban regeneration. The Department advises that, in the past 10 years, vesting has been used on 45 occasions for urban regeneration projects such as Victoria Square. On only 10% of those occasions was vesting opposed. On about half of those occasions, there were issues around establishing ownership, but, on just less than half of those occasions, the vesting was described by the Department as friendly.

Those statistics probably reflect a booming property market where land or premises owners received satisfactory compensatory payments. As we all know only too well, the position today is very different. Vesting payments associated with urban regeneration projects will probably no longer generate anything like the same level of compensatory payments. Consequently, I expect that that will lead to more contesting of property acquisitions. The Committee will recognise the problems of increased indebtedness and negative equity and will value the Minister's view on how that might be combated.

The Committee has noted the Department's proposals on the vesting of homes in redevelopment areas, which the previous Member who spoke mentioned. Those are set

out in the consultation, which is entitled 'Policy to Support Owner Occupiers in Redevelopment Areas'. The proposals, as the Committee understands them, would help owner-occupiers to remain in a development area by allowing them to become a tenant in a social home or to buy an equity share in a home that is purchased through the house scale scheme. Although we have not taken a view, I anticipate that the Committee will be generally supportive of the proposals, but it should be noted that the measures will not address negative equity issues. It seems that, even under those proposals, it may still be possible for a homeowner who has negative equity to be left with a large debt after vesting and then be unable to secure a mortgage to buy an equity share in a new home.

There will also probably be issues for landlords in redevelopment areas. In their case, it appears that the DSD proposals on support for owner-occupiers will provide no help. I hope that, in today's debate, the Minister will clarify the extent of support that his Department will be able to provide for owner-occupiers and other property owners whose houses in redevelopment areas have been vested.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I will now give some views in a personal capacity and on behalf of the party.

Although the wording of the motion is far from perfect, I tried to understand where it is coming from. In some respects, it is understandable that its wording is far from perfect, as vesting is a difficult and complex issue that affects a lot of people. Indeed, Members who spoke previously cited the Village as an example. With that complexity comes a difficulty in drafting a perfect motion. However, the motion is imperfect in a couple of ways.

The focus in the motion on DFP, although understandable in some respects, is not entirely appropriate. The motion does not include all Departments and, indeed, does not include everyone who is affected. As Mr O'Loan mentioned, a significant number of people facing negative equity are not, as the motion says, "homeowners living in areas", but investors and landlords who are similarly affected.

The thorny issue is value for money. The amendment is much better than the motion, but it is also far from perfect, in that it does not touch on all relevant Departments either. It recognises that, even though everything that can

be done to ameliorate negative equity should be done, we cannot eliminate it in all cases. We cannot get around the fact that the public sector purchases and vests property at what is the appropriate or value-for-money price at a particular time. We cannot have two systems: one for good times and one for bad times when property prices are difficult.

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

The Chairperson of the Committee for Social

Development: Vesting is a difficult, complex issue, and the motion and the amendment are both imperfect. However, the amendment, at least, tries to better encapsulate the issues than the motion.

Mr Beggs: I thank the proposers of both the motion and the amendment for bringing the issue forward. It has been useful to have the debate. Very rarely do people who have spent their lives saving for their homes take it sympathetically when a government agency comes knocking on their door to tell them that it wants to buy the property and that, if they refuse to sell, it will forcibly buy out the property through the vesting system. I am sure that many Members know constituents whose gardens or properties have, in the past, been vested for such schemes as road improvements. The process is very painful for all concerned. However, what we are discussing today is even more important than losing farmland or part of a garden. Some citizens are losing their homes, often at tens of thousands of pounds less than they may have originally paid for them just a couple of years ago.

People are being left compulsorily in debt by the actions of government. We must recognise that the particular economic times that we are in today have not allowed those people to ride out the normal economic cycle whereby they could live in negative equity for a period until house prices recover. Our property prices followed the former boom and bust prices that were experienced in the Republic of Ireland. Those also increased to a much greater extent than prices in other parts of the United Kingdom, and, again to a much greater extent, they reduced in value. Therefore, no matter what type of property is being vested, it is very likely to go at a considerably reduced rate. Given the standard practice and policy of paying the

current market value, many people are being left significantly less well off.

Over the past 12 months, vesting has continued as normal in Northern Ireland, despite the significant reduction in values. However, as Members mentioned, the circumstances around the vesting of hundreds of homes in the Village area of south Belfast are particularly troubling, given both the number of people that are involved and the timing, which falls in the middle of the economic process that I discussed. Potentially, a significant number of people — a figure of over 50 — will be left not only without a home but with thousands of pounds, perhaps tens of thousands of pounds, of debt, due largely, I would argue, to the exceptional market conditions that we have faced.

I thank the Assembly Research and Library Services for providing background information on today's debate. I note that, over the past year, property prices in England have increased by 9%, in Scotland by 3.7% and in Wales by 10%. In Northern Ireland, property prices have reduced by 17%. So, those individuals have faced vesting during perhaps the worst housing situation that there has ever been; certainly the worst that I can remember. Therefore, there are exceptional circumstances that ought to be looked at.

1.45 pm

We all recognise that there are many benefits from redevelopments and the upgrading of the housing stock, but there are particular difficulties for individual families in that situation. Given the significant reduction in house values, exceptional measures need to be looked at. For example, perhaps we should consider an exceptional hardship fund.

It would be helpful if the Minister for Social Development could make us aware of the number of homes that have been affected by negative equity. It is one thing for people to lose their homes and be rehoused in social housing by the Housing Executive, but it is another for them to lose their homes, be rehoused and be in tens of thousands of pounds of debt. They have to pay back that debt for the rest of their lives and yet have no home to live in. In light of those exceptional circumstances, that issue needs to be looked at.

I recognise that, as an Assembly, we face financial constraints and that other issues need

to be taken into consideration. The response needs to be balanced; we need to protect the public against future property speculations.

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

Mr Beggs: It is worth seeing what can be done in this exceptional situation.

Ms Lo: I support the motion and the amendment. I welcome the debate; I want to talk specifically about my constituency. In the Village area, many homes were bought at the peak of the housing market, particularly by first-time buyers. However, at the time of vesting, those properties were worth far less than what was paid for them, leaving many owner-occupiers in severe levels of negative equity, even when home loss grants and disturbance payments are taken into account.

Many of my constituents have spoken to me about that issue. They are angry and upset. They did not want to sell their homes but were made to do so by government at a time of rock-bottom property values. They are being left with debts of between £20,000 and, in the case of one young landlord, £100,000, and must pay what is left of the mortgage with no property to show for it. As a consequence, they may also face increased financial strain, difficulties with further property purchases and bad credit scoring should the debt be unpaid. In light of the current financial climate and job market, those issues simply exacerbate what is an already difficult period for some.

Mr O'Loan suggested that there is less sympathy for buy-to-let landlords than for owner-occupiers. However, as a result of the vesting, they face an enormous financial burden and are not entitled to home loss or disturbance payments, which are only available to owner-occupiers. It is concerning that the Housing Executive can vest properties and get rental income from tenants while landlords retain responsibility for making mortgage payments. As a knock-on effect, landlords have refused to notify tenants that they are now Housing Executive tenants and are not returning rents or deposits. The Housing Executive is then asking those tenants for backdated rent arrears.

The greater Village area has been neglected for some time. The need to provide quality affordable social housing is evident, but should it be done at the cost of homeowners who have

lived in the same home all their lives or saved to buy and spent significant time and money on improving their homes? It is only fair to say that DSD has created a gulf in equality between social tenants and homeowners in the Village area. It is immoral for a statutory body to place such constraints on individuals, especially in a recession.

Consultation on the policy to support owner-occupiers in redevelopment areas has just ended, but neither option that it produced goes far enough. Neither option addresses the reality of negative equity that is faced by many people in the Village area. Neither option addresses the problem of where owner-occupiers will live between their homes being vested and demolished and a new home being ready, and the cost that they will incur in that time.

There is also no option for those who have invested in the area as landlords. Landlords often invest significant amounts of money in their properties to ensure that they are of an acceptable standard, and, therefore —

Mr Beggs: Does the Member accept that there is a difference between owner-occupiers and landlords? Landlords will have invested over the last number of years. Many have speculated and done very well from the properties that they invested in. With any investment, there is a risk. Does the Member not accept that landlords have taken a risk, that it should not always be one way and that we should concentrate on homeowners?

Ms Lo: I agree. However, landlords also have value in that they provide social housing and rented accommodation. Landlords often invest in their properties to ensure that they are of an acceptable standard and, therefore, increase the desirability of, and living standards in, the area. South Belfast is one such case; there is an area of rented accommodation available to all. However, many people in the Village find themselves in significant negative equity —

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

Ms Lo: — despite the amount of money that they invested in their homes and the area.

Mr Buchanan: I have no doubt that the motion was born of the difficulties faced by homeowners and landlords in the Village area of south Belfast, which, in May 2008, was declared

an urban renewal area by the then Minister for Social Development, Ms Margaret Ritchie. At that time, the reason given for declaring it an urban renewal area was that a survey had found that one in three homes there were unfit to live in; that one in five homes were vacant; and that there was a high level of disrepair. However, much of that was brought about by the Housing Executive itself.

Prior to the announcement, the Housing Executive moved into the area, purchased more than 100 homes from owner-occupiers and immediately bricked them up. It purchased those homes at an average of £150,000 and, at the same time, refused to purchase homes from landlords in the area. That added to the blight of the Village area, thus leaving it ripe to be announced as an area of urban renewal. When the announcement was made, the Minister, Ms Ritchie, declared that £110 million had been set aside for the vesting of properties in the scheme. However, unfortunately, that is not now coming to fruition as far as landlords and homeowners are concerned. Many face huge deficits in respect of what they are being offered for their properties compared to what they purchased them for. Some of those people purchased their properties only two or three years ago. However, they now receive only 50%, or perhaps less, of what they paid for those properties a short time ago.

Indeed, the entire situation is and has been poorly handled by the Housing Executive, LPS and DSD. There has been a severe lack of consultation between the agencies and the Department and homeowners and landlords in the area.

The Housing Executive vested the houses from landlords in May. It took over the current tenancy of those houses and is now receiving rent for them, while the landlords have been left to pick up the mortgages and to continue to make repayments with no income at all from the rent of those houses. That is placing huge difficulties on landlords with their lenders, and that must be looked at urgently. Further to that, the Housing Executive is now offering less than 50% of the current valuation given by the Northern Ireland house price index for houses in that area. Therefore, I also ask the Minister to look into that matter. That is a far cry from the 'Guide to Compensation for Business Owners and Occupiers', which states:

"you should be no worse off in financial terms after the acquisition than you were before."

Another difficulty is that homeowners have received two or three different valuations, yet they have not received a written valuation from LPS allowing them to take that forward to a tribunal if they wish to contest the value that has been placed on their homes. I call on the Minister for Social Development to take urgent action on the matter.

I received an e-mail from a homeowner, which gives some indication of how the issue is seriously affecting people's lives. He stated that there is a problem with negative equity, and tenants are now expected to pay rent to the NIHE while still having to pay mortgages on homes that they no longer own. Therefore, there is the huge issue of credit rating. He went on to say that he was at his wits' end and that it had got to the point where he now found it hard to concentrate on his job. He was snapping at his wife, found it hard to deal with his children and difficult to sleep at night. He constantly felt sick, and his credit rating will soon be destroyed, which will jeopardise his business, thus taking away his ability to support him and his family now and in the future.

As the previous Member who spoke, Ms Anna Lo, stated, people do not want to sell their homes at this time.

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

Mr Buchanan: However, their homes are being taken away from them, and they are being left to take up the huge financial burden. Again, I urgently call on the Minister to look at that issue. It is something that is focused on his Department, and I ask that he and his Department take the matter on board as a matter of urgency.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I support the motion. It deals with an aspect of vesting, which, while welcomed in the context of improving areas, should not have impacted so much on people whose homes or businesses have been vested to make way for redevelopment. The recent collapse of the property market impacted negatively on thousands of people who were encouraged to buy their houses or to tap into the booming property market. Many of those people believed that the bubble would never burst.

Very few people predicted that there would be a collapse in the property market. Lenders offered incredible deals, and people on certain types of benefits were encouraged to buy their homes. Large amounts of money were on offer to people to become homeowners, and agents for lenders rapped on doors and convinced people to take out second mortgages, with no concerns that they may not be in a position to pay them back if anything went wrong. When the market fell apart, those people, and thousands more, faced ruin. Many people have already lost their homes, and many more face that same future. There have been recent draconian attacks on people who received help in the shape of housing benefit to pay the interest on their mortgages, and this is yet another nail in the coffin for many of those people who now also face losing their homes.

People who own several homes and rent them as part of the private rented sector and have had their homes vested are being impacted by the collapse of the housing market. All are facing financial ruin. None of those people saw it coming, but the vesting of redevelopment areas has had a huge negative impact on many homeowners.

2.00 pm

Sinn Féin fully supports the announcement of redevelopment, whether in the Village area of Belfast, the long streets of the New Lodge or wherever it takes place, to ensure the provision of better homes for local residents and a new beginning for those communities. However, an unforeseen consequence has been that people have been trapped in negative equity. Those people did not know what was lurking down the road. They had not foreseen that the former Minister would change her mind from her previous stance of refurbishment over redevelopment. Had those people known, some would have thought twice about buying their homes.

Sinn Féin members have dealt with a number of cases of residents of the Village area who bought their homes; homeowners who mortgaged themselves to the hilt. Those people would have been happy to live the rest of their lives in their homes. However, because the area was vested, they find themselves owing debts of £50,000 or £60,000. The property market has collapsed and the value of their homes with it. Sinn Féin has also spoken to a number of small landlords, owning between one and three houses, who invested all their savings. One

woman who had been to university and got a degree bought a house at the top of the market and put it out to rent. Not only does she now face financial ruin if she cannot pay, she faces bankruptcy and the loss of her career.

Some people who have been caught in negative equity have informed my party that a report existed in the Housing Executive at the time of vesting that spelled out the problems that many people would face when vesting became a reality. It was their understanding that the then Minister chose to ignore that report and advice. Looking back, had vesting been carried out in a more co-ordinated fashion, a mechanism may have been found to deal with the problem.

Much has been said about how people affected by the collapse of the Presbyterian Mutual Society lost thousands of pounds at the height of the financial crash and about the help and assistance that they have, rightly, been given to progress their case. People who are suffering as a result of being put into negative equity face ruin because they have been caught up in a ministerial decision to vest areas. Although Sinn Féin has no difficulty with the decision and has supported local residents in campaigns to rid themselves of poor housing, it has concern about the people who have suffered as a result of the vesting decision.

The Assembly must face up to that. My party asks Ministers to put their heads together to see what can be done to help those who have fallen foul of the vesting system. We need to know what can be done to help those people. We also need to know what, if any, advice was given to the former Minister for Social Development by the Housing Executive and whether a report existed that warned of difficulties. I support the motion. Go raibh míle maith agat.

The Minister for Social Development

(Mr Attwood): I very much welcome the debate. There will be no argument from me that, whatever about the legal situation — some aspects of which I may touch upon — there is an issue of fairness. I and other Ministers with relevant responsibility — and, ultimately, the Executive — need to address that fairness issue. As Anna Lo said, people are being made to sell their houses at rock-bottom prices. She articulated fully all the other consequences for people's financial circumstances when they must sell their properties at lower prices.

I do not accept one or two comments that were made; for example, that DSD is responsible for creating a gulf in equality in the Village. Not one politician who represents South Belfast, either in the Assembly or on the city council, differed from the decision to go ahead with the regeneration and redevelopment of the Village area.

Other Members have mentioned Margaret Ritchie's visit to the Village. She was struck politically, personally and emotionally by the state of housing there. The decision in principle to redevelop the Village was a right and healthy one. It demonstrated that the Government are committed to the needs of disadvantaged communities. That was acknowledged and appreciated by the people of the Village. Certainly, I visited there last Friday, along with Paula Bradshaw and other community representatives, and I did not get any sense from anyone that there was now a difference of opinion about the need to redevelop the Village and the principle of vesting. Yes, there are issues with its consequences. However, I did not pick up any serious difference of opinion about the fact that the decision to vest was appropriate and that the development of the Village was necessary. That is why I do not agree that DSD created a gulf in equality, or with certain other comments that were made, which I found a little bit ungracious.

It is important that we speak with one voice on the motion and the amendment, because, as the proposer confirmed, the issue of the Village cannot be separated from the issue of negative equity in the long streets. I met residents from the long streets only 10 days ago to begin to scope that out in more detail with them. The issue about the Village and the long streets cannot be divorced from the wider issues of negative equity, where they impact upon any community or Department.

I picked up from the comments from various Members who spoke that there is a need to be innovative. It seems to me that if the Government have been innovative and have stretched themselves in respect of the Presbyterian Mutual Society and the potential to more fully, if not completely, resolve that issue, and if other elements of the Government are thinking, as they see fit, of other innovative ways of dealing with issues of poverty and disadvantage, whatever I might think about that, we are obliged to get on our thinking caps and to deal with the matter across Departments and the Executive as fully as possible. I differentiate, in my head, to some extent, between traditional homeowners and

mere investors, despite the fact that that is not legally feasible. The victims are living with the consequences of a good and healthy Government decision in a way that impacts adversely and in an unanticipated way upon them.

I make that point, because Mr Beggs mentioned house prices in Northern Ireland. Britain has turned a corner in respect of house prices, but we have not, and we will not do so for the next number of years, potentially. The situation in Northern Ireland is unlike that in any other part of these islands, because it is still in recession, and, according to Ulster Bank advice, that will continue until at least the end of 2012. Our situation is such that there may be fewer public sector jobs, and the private sector may not be big enough or prosperous enough to pick up the shortfall. Therefore, the property market may not be in a process of recovery until the end of 2012 or, potentially, later. Alternatively, if it is in a process of recovery, it will be very slow and, in any situation, that will adversely impact upon the people in the Village and the other areas that I referred to. Therefore, there is an obligation to think innovatively in those circumstances and to see what we can do.

I am a Minister, and I think that all Ministers should not only look at the problem but identify a solution. In that regard, I have taken steps. They have not come to any fruition yet, but I think that they have been worth taking. First, I contacted the Attorney General for Northern Ireland and asked him to put his mind to the legal situation that has arisen from the Lands Tribunal decision of three months ago in relation to the obligations of the state as regards negative equity. It may be that the law does not allow flexibility, and that appears to have been the outcome of the Lands Tribunal decision. However, very often the Lands Tribunal meets and makes assessments that are based on market values; it does not necessarily delve into the full consequences of the law. There was legal argument at the Lands Tribunal hearing that I am talking about, but I wonder whether some further legal assessment could be made in order to determine whether there is any flexibility or latitude in the law, as it exists, to determine whether there is scope for dealing with the matter.

Secondly, as I indicated earlier, I have written to the Minister of Finance and Personnel in relation to the matter, and he is not unsympathetic. He acknowledges and appreciates that there is an issue. An issue is different from a solution to the problem, but he acknowledges, nonetheless,

that there is an issue. I suggest that the Minister for Regional Development, Conor Murphy, the Minister of Finance and Personnel, Sammy Wilson, and I should gather and have a conversation about the issue.

As Members indicated, in my Department, we have just finished a consultation, as of last Wednesday, in respect of a new owner-occupier policy. Responses to date have been very positive in respect of that scheme. I hope that that scheme, subject to its being agreed in the fullness of time, will have some impact on a number of families who may have to sell but will have the opportunity to go back into the neighbourhood from which they came with the golden share scheme, through the housing association. However, I accept that although that may create some certainty around their future accommodation, it does not create certainty around the issue of negative equity. Nonetheless, it suggests that the Government are trying to be innovative in dealing with a number of families who have a requirement to go back into the area from which they came, even if it does not fully resolve the issue of negative equity.

Mr Beggs asked about the numbers involved. I can confirm that the total number of affected properties in the Village area is 538. Of those, 149 have been sold voluntarily. Once Margaret Ritchie indicated her intention to regenerate the Village in 2008, there was an option for people to proceed in advance of vesting by way of voluntary sale. Those matters have progressed, but the valuation was based on the valuation back then, not the valuation based on vesting, which is what the Lands Tribunal has said should be the valuation for all the other properties.

Of the residue of the 538, 283 have made claims, and the Housing Executive and the Department have not yet made contact with the families living in 36 properties, despite some exhaustive efforts. Although I am subject to legal advice in respect of this matter, the homeowners of all those properties — the people who have traditionally lived in that area or have bought in that area more recently — are now suffering the effects of the property slump. I have particular sympathy in relation to all that.

Mr Hamilton, who has now gone to speak at a housing conference, made a very important point, which illustrates why the matter has to be scoped out around the Executive table and across Departments. Given that over the next

period there will be intentions to vest in one Department or another, there could be some further consequences in Departments when it comes to negative equity on the home or lands front. Therefore, given that the matter has now been highlighted, it is my understanding — subject to correction — that the land for the completion of the Aughnacloy to Derry road will potentially give rise to a heavy cost in relation to those landowners who are living in negative equity. Given all that, Simon Hamilton's point that there may be more cases coming down the road is important.

Thomas Buchanan made a number of interesting comments. I will not be able to answer them all, but I will come back to him in due course. I took note of the fact that guidance in relation to vesting and the value of properties states that a person should be no worse off after than before. Perhaps we could begin to scope that out in conversation with the Attorney General.

I do not accept the argument that there has been a severe lack of consultation or that the NI Housing Executive and DSD have done very poorly. At the time when the proposal for regeneration was announced, there was dancing in the streets in some parts of the Village. Since that time — as the figures that I have just outlined to Mr Beggs confirm — there have been quite exhaustive attempts to discuss with people their particular circumstances and to move the situation forward, to the point that there are now only 36 properties whose occupants have not made contact with the Department or the Housing Executive, despite some exhaustive efforts.

I will also deal with the valid point in respect of the fact that the Housing Executive now owns the properties and gets the rents, but the old landlords still pay the mortgages. Mr Buchanan made that point, and it has been made to me previously.

We are all subject to the law and cannot act outside it; otherwise we would be ultra vires. Somebody, somewhere, presumably in the Department of Finance and Personnel if nowhere else, or perhaps the Attorney General, would be on my case if I acted beyond the law and would warn me of the risks to the public purse and the good authority of Government.

2.15 pm

That the Housing Executive now gets the rents arose because landlords have yet to agree

compensation based on the market value by LPS for reasons that were well aired in the debate. Ultimately, it is for landlords to agree the valuation with LPS or take the matter to the Lands Tribunal and, thereafter, if there is an argument in law, to the Court of Appeal.

I welcome the debate. I think that Ms Ní Chuilín would concur with me that its tone and character was very good. There is no lack of sympathy. However, the issue is whether we can provide more support, if not full support, for the families that are affected by negative equity, in particular traditional homeowners.

As I said, I tried to scope out the actions taken by the Department to date, but many more actions need to be taken by the Government to resolve the matter. However, although Government need to be vigilant not to over-commit on possible future costs, if we have been able to stretch ourselves on the Presbyterian Mutual Society and on other issues, is this not a matter — a good Government decision that results in bad consequences for a number of people — in which we try to scope out what more we can do to assist those in need, whatever the law may be?

Mr McDevitt: Like the Minister, I think that it was a testament to the House that the debate was conducted in such a positive spirit. Everyone has a sense of the crisis that exists in many households as a result of the financial crisis that has engulfed our islands and beyond. That crisis is all the more acute when it has been punctuated by the fact that the state wants to do something with the area or neighbourhood that your house may be in.

Like other Members, I draw a distinction between investors and those who have been caught up in negative equity as a result of finding their home due for redevelopment. As Mr Beggs suggested, there is a risk in investment that can either pay off or cost. However, we would be wrong to put people who have invested in the same category as those who genuinely bought to be their home a property that is now subject to a vesting order.

I thank all Members who spoke, particularly Ms Ní Chuilín for her generosity and willingness to accept the amendment. The principal reason for seeking to amend the motion was not in any way to detract from it but to contextualise it beyond the immediate issue of vesting for residential areas in Belfast in particular and to acknowledge that there are other types of vesting that the House will have to tackle in

the months and years ahead, not least the vesting required for some of our major road developments.

The other reason why we sought to influence the motion was because it called for individuals to be protected from negative equity. Although we would all love to be able to think that Government could protect people from negative equity, that is probably beyond the realms even of Government. Our ambition should be to mitigate the impacts of negative equity, particularly on homeowners.

Other colleagues who made a contribution included Declan O'Loan, who moved the amendment. It is worth noting, as he did, that the Village scheme is a very important and significant one. As an MLA for South Belfast whose office is not too far from the Village, I am reminded every day of the major benefits that the scheme will bring to that part of our city and the fact that, despite the market downturn and the downsides to some of the necessary steps that Government are having to take, it is being widely welcomed and positively received by people in the Village. It will give a very historic and important community in our city the opportunity to, quite literally, be born again.

Mr Hamilton rightly identified the complexity of the issues, and I welcome the support that he offered for the amendment.

Mr Beggs raised a number of issues, which the Minister sought to address, regarding the possibility of exceptional measures or special measures. We can all draw heart from the way that our colleagues have rallied round the savers in the Presbyterian Mutual Society and sought imaginative solutions. I look forward to a collection of Ministers being able to return to the House with imaginative solutions to the type of special circumstances that we have debated here today.

Ms Lo, Mr Buchanan and Mr Brady also made positive contributions. They all focused on the importance of protecting homes and highlighted the plight of those landlords who have found themselves on the wrong side of this particular decision.

For our part, we acknowledge the significant contribution that regeneration across our city, whether in south Belfast, north Belfast or other parts of Belfast, will play to the social well-being of our city. We note that the problem that we are debating goes beyond the doors of the Department for Social Development.

Ms Ní Chuilín: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I repeat my party's appreciation of the support for the motion from other parties. I think that I am right in saying that the DUP supports the motion and the amendment, although I am not too sure. I am prepared to give way if Thomas Buchanan or William Humphrey wants to add clarification.

Mr Buchanan: The DUP will not be voting against either the motion or the amendment.

Ms Ní Chuilín: I appreciate that. I dare say that, had Jimmy Spratt from South Belfast been here representing his constituents, that would have been more explicit than implicit. I appreciate the fact that the DUP is not going to vote against the motion or the amendment, because the House not dividing will send a message to people who live in areas of regeneration and face negative equity that they have representatives in the Assembly who have had, for at least an hour, their concerns at heart.

Regeneration is vital. There is not an elected representative worth his or her salt who has not called for some sort of redevelopment or regeneration in his or her area, be that for roads, city centres or town centres. In our case, the regeneration is needed in south and north Belfast, which have been mentioned a lot today, and is primarily centred on the regeneration of old homes with new communities. Regeneration is not just about homes. I appreciate that it involves roads, lighting, infrastructure, shops and other amenities.

Declan O'Loan, Roy Beggs, Anna Lo, Mickey Brady, Conall McDevitt and the Minister spoke about the plight of residents who face negative equity. They said that, although they have sympathy for landlords, there is much more sympathy for homeowners, who are in a worse situation. Investors take risks. That is not to take away from the effects or impacts on investors that were outlined in the e-mail that Thomas Buchanan received. However, investors take risks, and those risks are calculated. Homeowners had no choice; their homes were vested and, as a result of a policy that we are implementing, they face a situation in which they are disadvantaged.

I also support the call for the Executive to take a common approach to this. I included the Minister of Finance and Personnel in the text of the motion, not simply to tag him on to it, but because he has responsibility for land and property. However, the motion largely concerns

urban regeneration, for which the Minister for Social Development has lead responsibility. If he and his Executive colleagues, including those whom he mentioned — namely, the Minister for Regional Development and the Minister of Finance and Personnel — were to sit down together and look at how we might take forward proposals, that would be very welcome and would count as a good day's work. We would be a day closer to finding innovative ways of lessening the impact on people who are facing extreme financial circumstances.

I want the Minister for Social Development to look specifically at the impact on the social housing stock. The golden share scheme, for example, would have an impact. I invite the Minister, if he has not already done so, to look at examples of schemes elsewhere, and I place at his disposal the research that I have undertaken.

I thank Members who have spoken in favour of the motion for their support. I fully accept the principle behind the amendment. Our intention is to ensure that people, regardless of who they are or where they live, are not disadvantaged as a result of any policy that originates in the Assembly. We should look at the differences that investment makes to communities, wherever they are. We should learn whatever lessons we can, and we certainly should not pass on negative equity to areas that are waiting to be vested. Go raibh maith agat.

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

Main Question, as amended, put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly calls on the Minister of Finance and Personnel, in conjunction with Executive colleagues, to bring forward, within the lifetime of the current Assembly, proposals which seek to address or mitigate against homeowners, farm owners and land owners, living in areas that are due to be redeveloped by the Department for Social Development, the Department for Regional Development or any other Department, being unduly affected by negative equity and increased debt following the vesting of land or property.

Mr Deputy Speaker: As Question Time commences at 2.30 pm, I suggest that the House take its ease until that time.

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

2.30 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Justice

Dissident Republicans: Convictions

1. **Mr Campbell** asked the Minister of Justice how many people have been convicted for violent criminal activity associated with dissident republicans in the Londonderry, Newry and Antrim areas, over the last 18 months. (AQO 311/11)

The Minister of Justice (Mr Ford): Law enforcement agencies north and south of the border are acutely aware of the threat posed by terrorists and continue to work together to take appropriate steps to address it. That has been evidenced through the success they have had in arrests and charges and in preventing and disrupting many attacks. So far this year, there have been 181 arrests and 64 charges for terrorist offences. That is in addition to the 106 arrests made and 17 charges brought last year.

I commend the PSNI and An Garda Síochána on their recent successful operations that resulted in a number of arrests as well as the seizure of a considerable quantity of firearms, ammunition and bomb-making parts. Those operations were undoubtedly significant in disrupting terrorist activity and further demonstrate the determination of the authorities on both sides of the border to ensure that those involved in terrorism will not be allowed to succeed.

Unfortunately, the detailed information requested is not available as court conviction data does not contain background information in relation to the offences committed or the group with which an offender is affiliated. As a result, it is not possible to determine the number of convictions relating to violent criminal activity associated with dissident republicans.

Mr Campbell: I thank the Minister for his general reply. I understand the reasons for the lack of clarity on individual areas. Such activities have recently been condemned rather than condoned, which is welcome. However, will the Minister join me in calling for not just

condemnation but information, so that people are brought before the courts, are convicted, and serve long prison sentences as a result of such actions?

The Minister of Justice: Mr Campbell is absolutely right: what is needed most as part of the operation of policing with the community is the fullest co-operation, which is being given to a great extent by many people. The fullest possible co-operation is needed to ensure that those who are guilty of those offences are brought to book by the police, treated appropriately by the Public Prosecution Service and the courts, and, where appropriate, given long prison sentences, as the Member said.

Ms M Anderson: Go raibh maith agat. I too note the generality of the Minister's comments and appreciate the reason why. However, given the repeated calls from Mr Gregory Campbell, who asked the question, for such information to be given to the PSNI when it is investigating such activity, can the Minister tell me, and I appreciate that he may have to come back to me as he may not be able to answer, if he knows whether the PSNI has received similar information about violent unionist activity in the north-west, specifically the murder of Kevin McDaid, in the area where the Member who asked the question is MP, and the brutal attack on Paul McCauley in the city of Derry —

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

Ms M Anderson: That happened when the Member was a member of Derry City Council.

The Minister of Justice: I hoped I had emphasised that the Police Service has informed me that it is getting better co-operation from all sections of the community in dealing with some of these dreadful crimes. The precise issue of how each individual case is handled is an operational issue for the police, and it would not be appropriate for me to go into the detail of any individual case.

Mr McNarry: I understand fully the Minister's being unable to address the specific areas identified by Mr Campbell. Perhaps I will try my luck. Will the Minister tell us what the dissident threat level assessed by convictions in the Newtownards and Ballynahinch areas is? Is he content that the Chief Constable has all the necessary resources at his disposal to deal with the dissident threat, wherever it is?

The Minister of Justice: I am not in a position to give any detail on Newtownards and Ballynahinch any more than I was on Derry, Newry and Antrim. However, I have received requests from the Chief Constable to support his request for additional resources to deal with the additional threat that he faces, which is not the equivalent of that faced by any other police service in the United Kingdom.

In the context of the comprehensive spending review and the announcement that we expect on Wednesday of this week, it is vital that, in comparison with other services, the Police Service of Northern Ireland is resourced in a way that would allow it to deal with the additional responsibilities that it bears. I have been using every opportunity that I have to make that case at the highest level of government.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I agree with the Minister's views on police resources. How many briefings has he had from the Security Service since he came into office?

The Minister of Justice: I simply cannot answer that question in the form that was requested. With respect, after six months and one week, it is very difficult for me to remember every meeting that I have had. I assure the Member that, when I have met the Secretary of State, his responsibilities have meant that there have been occasions when members of the Security Service were present. Given that the Secretary of State's responsibilities involve national security, Members will appreciate that the detail that I am given on such matters is significantly less than that which he receives.

Mr Speaker: Question 2 has been withdrawn.

District Policing Partnerships

3. **Mr Hilditch** asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of the findings of the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency's district policing partnership survey 2010. (AQO 313/11)

The Minister of Justice: The cited survey is a very useful and interesting exercise that sets out what the public think of policing in their area and where they think that police attention should be focused. It makes a valuable contribution to the work of the Policing Board and the PSNI in setting priorities for the police in local areas right across Northern Ireland.

The public's views are just one of the factors that inform the policing priorities that are set for the PSNI. The board and the Chief Constable also bear in mind the importance of addressing the serious harm that is caused by terrorism and violent crime, which is infrequent in practice and which consequently, does not often feature prominently in a survey of that sort.

Mr Hilditch: I thank the Minister for his initial response. With the shockingly high figure of 40% of respondents citing antisocial behaviour as an identified issue, will the Minister undertake to investigate the work of the YMCA-led Bridge project, which is in my constituency, and review its excellent evaluation results? As funding through the CSPs runs out, will he also investigate the valuable work that they do, which could, perhaps, be sustainably funded?

The Minister of Justice: I assure the Member that I read with interest reports on a number of different initiatives that are undertaken by CSPs and voluntary organisations in different areas. If he is asking me to give a guarantee for the continuation of funding, I cannot do that. However, it is vital to ensure that we get the best possible results for the money that is expended. I am fully aware that, in many cases, that is done through voluntary organisations such as the YMCA.

Courts and Tribunals Service

4. **Ms S Ramsey** asked the Minister of Justice what steps he is taking to ensure that there is accountability within the court service. (AQO 314/11)

The Minister of Justice: The Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service is an agency of my Department. It is responsible for facilitating the conduct of the business of the courts and tribunals and for giving effect to civil court judgements. That work will be central to the annual report that, under section 68A of the Judicature (Northern Ireland) Act 1978, my Department is required to lay before the Assembly to describe how it has discharged its responsibilities for supporting the courts.

The day-to-day work of the service is the responsibility of the director and his senior management team. Governance is the immediate responsibility of the agency board, which is chaired by the director. In addition to its executive members, the board is attended

by four members of the judiciary, who are nominated by the Lord Chief Justice and whose role is to offer a judicial perspective on operational matters. The board also includes an independent non-executive member who was formerly the chief executive of the Courts Service of Ireland and who chairs the service's audit committee. The Chief Inspector of Criminal Justice also routinely carries out inspections into the service's work. Ultimately, the staff of the Courts and Tribunals Service are civil servants and are accountable to me. I meet regularly with the senior staff, and they understand that I expect them to maintain the highest possible standards of professionalism and service to the community.

Ms S Ramsey: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his response. Is he aware that there is a concern that, although the independence of the judiciary and the courts is important, it should not equate to a disjoint between the needs of the community and the work that the courts are doing and carrying out?

The Minister of Justice: I thank the Member for her question. We are all aware of the issues associated with ensuring that the independence of the judiciary is respected fully and that the Courts and Tribunals Service is fully accountable for the duties that it carries out to me, as Minister, and ultimately, through the Committee, to the Assembly. To ensure public confidence, it is vital that that administrative oversight be seen to be carried through fully while recognising entirely the necessity of the independence of the judiciary.

Mr Bell: On the accountability of the Court Service, does the Minister agree that there is an appalling delay between young people being brought before the courts and their cases being heard, which does not serve youth justice and the needs of the victim well?

The Minister of Justice: I am sure that Mr Bell, among others, has heard me make the point about delays, particularly avoidable delays, in the justice system. However, despite his careful phrasing, he should not base his complaint entirely on the Courts and Tribunals Service. There is an issue with ensuring joined-up justice between the police, the Public Prosecution Service and the Court Service. The only target that matters to the public is the one to shorten the time between an offence occurring and its

final resolution in the courts. Throughout my six months in office, I have regarded that as a priority, and I will continue to do so.

Ms Lo: Does the Minister agree that there is a distinction between elected representatives wanting to hold the Courts and Tribunals Service to account and Executive members' public criticism of the judiciary?

The Minister of Justice: I thought that I made it clear in my initial comment; however, we in the Chamber, as democratically elected and accountable politicians, need to be very careful about the independence of the judiciary. I am determined to ensure that the Courts and Tribunals Service is fully accountable to the House, and those of us who are tempted to comment directly on individual court cases need to be extremely careful.

Mrs D Kelly: Will the Minister give some indication of gender and community background in the Court Service? He spoke about building community confidence, but what measures will he take to redress the imbalances?

The Minister of Justice: Statistics relating to the gender and community background of staff in the Court Service are now the responsibility of the Northern Ireland Civil Service, so any issue needs to be addressed by the Civil Service. Nevertheless, public confidence in the operation of the Courts and Tribunals Service depends on seeing the job done accurately, correctly and properly on all occasions rather than on what an individual's background happens to be.

Prisoners: Support Services

5. **Ms Purvis** asked the Minister of Justice what procedures his Department has put in place, in conjunction with other Departments, to ensure that prisoners have access to the resources and support services required whilst in custody. (AQO 315/11)

The Minister of Justice: The Department of Justice and, in particular, the Prison Service has an extensive range of support services and resources to address prisoners' needs, including: healthcare; addressing offending behaviour; learning and skills services; dealing with relationship problems; debt; seeking jobs, accommodation and housing; and providing addiction services. I recognise the complex nature of the prison population, particularly

the many prisoners who present with mental health problems and personality disorders. The Prison Service has a strong working partnership with the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust for the delivery of healthcare services. On 7 September, I met the Health Minister, and our Departments will continue to work closely together to improve service delivery.

The Prison Service leads a multi-agency steering group, which includes representatives from the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) and the voluntary sector. The group looks at how best to address the needs of offenders with a learning disability and/or a learning and communication difficulty. In November, I expect to receive a report from the steering group that will include recommendations to improve identification, assessment, training and the joining up of services.

The Probation Board is a key partner for the Prison Service in the delivery of offender management services. The work of the Inspire Women's Project centre is one example of how the Department, the Northern Ireland Prison Service and the Probation Board work in partnership to meet the needs of offenders. The Prison Service also works in partnership with the Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders to reinforce family links with offenders, and family liaison officers are in place in each establishment.

Tackling the needs and problems encountered by prisoners is a key element in reducing reoffending. The partnerships to deliver those interventions and support services to promote the rehabilitation of offenders are, ultimately, an investment in the security and stability of the community.

2.45 pm

Ms Purvis: I thank the Minister for his very detailed response. I am delighted, as are many other Members, to see that there is joined-up multi-agency work to address the issues. I am sure that the Minister will agree that prison should be as much about rehabilitation as loss of liberty. I am keen to hear from him what resources other Departments, including DEL and, perhaps, the Department for Social Development (DSD), have committed to ensure that such multi-agency working delivers services.

The Minister of Justice: Ms Purvis makes an extremely valid point about the nature of joined-up working, and I am delighted that that element exists. At this stage, I cannot answer her question about the amount of resources that are being committed by other Departments. However, I will write to her.

Lord Morrow: I listened intently to the Minister's very lengthy response, in which he talked about ensuring that prisoners have access to all resources. There are some who believe that the same resources are not made available to victims. Does the Minister agree that it is important to assure the law-abiding world that victims also have a role in society and that they are not forgotten?

The Minister of Justice: Lord Morrow will know from his role as Chairperson of the Committee for Justice that the Justice Bill, which passed First Stage today, includes in large part measures to support services to victims. I am entirely aware of the point that he makes. However, I reiterate that ensuring the rehabilitation of offenders will provide a safer and more stable society for us all. The idea that, somehow, it is a question of either/or between victims and offenders is not an entirely accurate reflection of the position that we are in.

Mr O'Dowd: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I agree that it is not a case of either/or. Society and the taxpayers have invested substantially in workshops for the rehabilitation of prisoners in Maghaberry prison to prevent reoffending. However, on the day that the Committee for Justice visited Maghaberry, those workshops were closed; therefore, they were of no benefit to the prisoners or to society.

Mr Speaker: The Member must ask his question.

Mr O'Dowd: I am led to understand that that was not the only occasion when those workshops were closed. Does the Minister agree that if we have invested in facilities in jails, they should be open and they should be used?

The Minister of Justice: I agree in principle that such facilities should be open and should be used. I suspect that what happened on the day of the visit, as happens on other days, was because of issues around having adequate staffing on duty in the prison to deal with all the necessary duties that prison officers have to perform. Nevertheless, if the Member wishes to

supply me with specific details, I will ensure that they are checked for him.

Police: Injury on Duty Pensions

6. **Mr Spratt** asked the Minister of Justice if he can offer an assurance that recommendations on injury on duty pensions for former and serving policing officers, outlined in the review of police injury award arrangements, will be implemented as soon as possible.
(AQO 316/11)

The Minister of Justice: I thank the Member for his question and thank him for his role in co-chairing the review panel. The co-operation demonstrated by the panel enabled a balanced and fair report to be produced in relatively short order and in line with the intended timescale. I published the final report of the review of police injury award arrangements on Thursday 7 October. The report contains 17 recommendations, some of which are for my Department to implement, while others are the responsibility of the Policing Board. I can offer an assurance that the recommendations that are under my control will be implemented as soon as possible; in fact, my officials have already started work on them. Progress on the recommendations will be reviewed by the panel in March 2011.

Mr Spratt: I thank the Minister for his remarks. The review was a tripartite process, involving the PSNI pensions branch, the Northern Ireland Policing Board and the Department of Justice. Against the background of the present economic climate, does the Minister agree that it would be worthwhile, given that progress on the review's recommendations will be monitored, to determine whether the administration costs incurred by all three organisations can be improved?

The Minister of Justice: I certainly agree that we need to be very sure of the costs of carrying out those processes. That is why, for example, there is a recommendation to examine the question of whether two medical practitioners should be involved in appeals.

There are benefits in having two practitioners, but there are also costs. We need to be careful to ensure the best treatment for the officers who are affected and, at the same time, ensure that costs do not run out of control.

Mr McCarthy: The Justice Minister referred to the fact that the review was co-chaired by a

member of the Policing Board. Can the House take reassurance that that is evidence of an effective working relationship between the Department of Justice and the Policing Board?

The Minister of Justice: I certainly hope so. Members in all parts of the House, not just my own colleagues, will have heard me talk about partnership on a number of occasions. That relationship is a practical example of where a problem was highlighted in Northern Ireland — it has some crossover with issues in England, Wales and Scotland — and where the issues in this region were tackled by the Department of Justice and the Policing Board. I already highlighted Mr Spratt's role in co-chairing that. We have been able to resolve the issues for officers in the Police Service of Northern Ireland extremely rapidly. I hope that, by March, when the review is reconvened, there will have been solutions to some of the outstanding issues that are before the courts in England. That will enable further progress in those areas.

Justice Bill

7. **Mr I McCrea** asked the Minister of Justice what is the current position on the Justice Bill. (AQO 317/11)

The Minister of Justice: As I am sure that the Member is aware, I was pleased during Executive Committee business at noon today to introduce the Justice Bill to the Assembly. The Justice Bill is an important and specific commitment from the Hillsborough Castle Agreement and is designed to provide better services for victims and witnesses and to improve community safety, our business systems, efficiency and access to justice. The Bill is all about delivering a better and more effective service to everyone in Northern Ireland, including victims, communities and court users, in a more efficient and cost-conscious way. I am extremely pleased to be able to bring forward the first piece of devolved justice legislation to a Northern Ireland legislature for 40 years.

Mr I McCrea: I thank the Minister for his response and welcome the fact that the Justice Bill is moving forward. First, will the Minister give the House an assurance that the Bill will be fit for purpose for Northern Ireland issues and has not been plucked from other Bills in England, Scotland and Wales? Secondly, will he outline the issues around the Attorney General

and explain why his accountability to the Public Prosecution Service is not included in the Bill?

The Minister of Justice: I assure the Member that, as far as I can see, the Bill is fit for purpose and is tailored to the needs of Northern Ireland. Clearly, elements of the Bill are similar to legislation in other jurisdictions. However, it has been drawn up to meet the needs of this society, and I have no doubt that, if the Department has not already satisfied that point, Lord Morrow and his colleagues will ensure that that is the case as the Bill progresses — assuming that it is given Second Stage approval in a couple of weeks' time — through its Committee Stage.

Mr McCrea also asked about the relationship between the Attorney General and the Public Prosecution Service. The simple reality is that that relationship is a matter for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister not for the Department of Justice alone. Discussions on that are ongoing.

Mr O'Loan: Does the Minister have any further legislation to bring to the Assembly, particularly on the Prison Service?

The Minister of Justice: Given the size of the Bill that I introduced today and the short time that is available between now and the Assembly elections next year, it is, with the possibility of one or two minor exceptions to introduce specific small matters, most unlikely that there will be any further primary legislation from my Department. However, officials are already looking at the possible content of a justice Bill for the new Assembly. We have certainly not gone to sleep now that this Justice Bill has been agreed.

Mr Lyttle: Will the Minister reassure the House that full account will be taken of any equality issues that arise with the Justice Bill?

The Minister of Justice: Yes. The majority of matters in the Bill were considered at some previous stage, including through an equality impact assessment. Nonetheless, it was appropriate to review the Bill as a whole through an equality impact assessment, which was published on 12 August. The consultation closes on 4 November at almost exactly the same time as the Bill is due to go to the Committee, and I have no doubt that it will inform the Committee's deliberations during Committee Stage.

Crime: Reoffending

8. **Mr Brady** asked the Minister of Justice how many people convicted of violent crimes in the last five years have reoffended. (AQO 318/11)

The Minister of Justice: The most recent figures available relate to those who were released from a custodial sentence in 2007 or who received a community disposal in the calendar year 2007 following a violent offence: 30.6% of those who were released from a custodial sentence and 24.7% of those who received a community supervision sentence reoffended within a one-year period. Although it is not currently possible to provide directly comparable figures for Scotland or Ireland because of the different structure of offences, the rate of serious reoffending in Northern Ireland compares favourably with that in England and Wales.

Mr Brady: I thank the Minister for his answer. Will he agree that it is important, not only for the individual offender but for society, that offenders are offered education and vocational training in jail in a bid to reduce reoffending?

The Minister of Justice: Yes, I agree with Mr Brady, as I agreed with Ms Purvis earlier. It is important for the good of society that offenders are rehabilitated while serving custodial sentences and not merely incarcerated. There is a real issue as to how we ensure that we make use of the time when prisoners are in jail to ensure that they come out with less chance of reoffending than would otherwise be the case. We should certainly not be complacent, even though our reoffending rates are somewhat better than those in England and Wales. There is still more work to be done in Northern Ireland.

Mr Givan: In light of the reoffending rate, does the Minister believe that the rehabilitation offered in the first place is not working, and that those individuals who continue to reoffend rather than be rehabilitated need to be punished so that they do not commit the crime again?

The Minister of Justice: I understood that if any individual were convicted of a serious offence, including whether they had previously served a prison sentence, they would be likely to be sent back to prison. I thought that that was the concept of punishment. However, we need to be clear that if people are sent to prison as punishment, they are not sent to prison for punishment. The duty of the prison is to

rehabilitate because that is what, ultimately, protects the community.

Mr Kennedy: In order to placate public concern on the matter, are there any specific measures that the Minister intends to bring forward to tackle the reoffending issue in Northern Ireland?

The Minister of Justice: I am aware that there is public concern. However, Members need to be careful in how that is presented. Northern Ireland's crime rate is low in comparison to other regions of these islands. Although we may always be concerned about individual offences, particularly the kind of offences that make headlines when they affect older members of the community, for example, we should not suggest that that is representative of this society. We should recognise that the minority of offences are a minority. We must ensure that we do the maximum possible to prevent such offences and to rehabilitate offenders to ensure that there is no reoffending. However, to suggest that we are in a worse place than others, or that that trend is in the wrong direction, is not an accurate reflection of our position at the moment.

Mr McDevitt: Does the Minister believe that someone convicted of a violent crime should always go to prison?

The Minister of Justice: I believe that those convicted should receive the appropriate sentence determined by the judiciary to ensure that there is full impartiality of the judiciary in carrying that through. I acknowledge that there are issues with regard to sentencing guidelines that have been raised in this House and elsewhere, which is why I have announced a consultation on sentencing guidelines mechanisms. We have seen significant work done by the Lord Chief Justice to inform the work of his colleagues. There is also the possibility of a more formal sentencing guidelines mechanism. I will await the outcome of that consultation with interest. Ultimately, any individual case must be left to the judge alone.

Drugs

9. **Mr S Anderson** asked the Minister of Justice if he has had any discussions, in the last three months, with senior police representatives or the Public Prosecution Service in relation to the illegal drugs trade. (AQO 319/11)

The Minister of Justice: As Justice Minister, I chair the Organised Crime Task Force

stakeholder group. I regularly receive quarterly briefings on the work streams of a number of expert subgroups, each of which deals with specific areas of organised crime, including illegal drugs.

At the most recent meeting of the stakeholder group, which was held on 15 September, I was advised that the key issues that the drugs expert group is examining include cannabis factories, legal highs and head shops. The stakeholder group's next meeting is due to take place on 8 December, at which time I will receive a further update on the work of each group.

I have not had any recent discussions on illegal drugs with the Public Prosecution Service. However, the drugs expert group has recently invited the PPS to nominate a representative to sit on it. I am pleased to say that the PPS has accepted the invitation, and a representative will attend the group's next meeting, which is scheduled to take place in early December.

3.00 pm

Regional Development

DRD: Savings

1. **Mr Gibson** asked the Minister for Regional Development what savings have been identified within his Department and what plans he has to implement these savings. (AQO 325/11)

The Minister for Regional Development

(Mr Murphy): The Executive have not yet agreed savings targets for Departments. Therefore, at this stage, my Department is not in a position to provide details of savings or how they would be implemented. My officials are reviewing all Department for Regional Development (DRD) budgets over the next four years to assess the commitments that are already in place.

Mr Gibson: I thank the Minister for his response. As much as I appreciate the role of the Executive in the process, I wonder how it is the case that other Ministers have presented priorities and savings plans for their Departments. Why has the Minister not done likewise? Can he tell the House whether he is able to meet the timescales outlined by the Minister of Finance and Personnel?

The Minister for Regional Development: The Executive, to whom I answer as well as to the

House, set a programme that included an awayday. We had discussions about how we could collectively face and deal with all the issues that are to come before us and how we would prioritise them and look at possible revenue streams. The Department of Finance and Personnel has set off on its own course and is asking Departments to offer up cuts and to outline what impact they believe they would have and how they could deal with them. We have not yet been told what the cuts might be. I have done much work in the Department to plan for all the scenarios that we may face, but I would certainly prefer to follow the Executive route of challenging any cuts and of working together to decide our priorities and to look at the issues that affect us rather than follow a route of acquiescence and offering up a slash-and-burn policy in my Department in line with a Tory demand.

Mr Cree: The Minister referred to the review that his Department is undertaking. I wonder whether he will share with us just what capital projects were reviewed. Can he also update us on the position of the funds — namely, the £400 million for the A5 project — that the Irish Government pledged to provide?

The Minister for Regional Development:

I have held a series of meetings with officials in my Department, and, as I said, we have reviewed all prospects for public finance, which includes everything on which the Department spends its money. We have completed all those exercises; indeed, we intend to revisit them after Wednesday. I do not consider it necessary to say to the public that we are willing to cut schemes a, b, c, d and e. We, in the Executive, have a collective view of how we should approach all this, and I am prepared and happy to stay within that collective view and to discuss how we can approach issues together rather than follow the DFP route, which is simply to offer ourselves up for whatever cuts the Tory Government might try to impose on us, without offering any resistance whatsoever.

As recently as the other week, at a meeting of the Dáil's Joint Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement — I know that the Member's party does not have an opportunity to attend its meetings, but other parties do have that opportunity and should take it up — Micheál Martin, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, reaffirmed, for the umpteenth time, the Dublin

Government's commitment to support financially both the A5 and the A8 schemes.

Mr McDevitt: Given the Minister's reluctance to give us any detail on cuts, I wonder why he has been able to confirm that there will be a particularly Tory-style cut to the cycling budget: a cut of 98%, from approximately £450,000 to £8,000. Perhaps the Minister can tell us what he thinks that that says about his commitment to sustainable transport?

The Minister for Regional Development: It is not surprising that the Member hitches his bicycle to any particular bandwagon that is rolling by — he is well renowned for it. In this case, he and some of those with him have taken a very narrow view of what is spent on cycling.

They have taken a narrow view not only in respect of the budget but geographically, because they have looked just at Belfast. I regret that the Friends of the Earth document focuses on cycling only in Belfast when there is also a broad interest in cycling in the rest of the Six Counties. They ignore the fact that cycle lanes have been provided for in all new road builds. They have taken a narrow view of one section of the budget. I have been proactive — *[Interruption.]*

There is a lot of chatter in the Chamber, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Order.

The Minister for Regional Development: It is coming from the directors' club over there in the corner.

I have been very proactive in supporting cycling. My Department and I contributed to ensuring that Sustrans has a cycling officer to encourage school pupils to cycle.

The Member will know, as everyone else does, that we had to find savings this year, even before any cuts that are identified on Wednesday are delivered. He knows that all budgets are under pressure. His own party's response to that was to call on all the Departments, collectively, to give more money to build social housing. I am not sure where he would have fitted bicycles into the social housing plans, but, certainly, that approach would have cut money from all our budgets, including that for cycling. Therefore, I will not take lectures on that from him. He should go and examine what his party's approach has

been to the financial difficulties that we all face. I have promoted and will continue to promote cycling, not just in Belfast, where his interest lies, but across the Six Counties and the country in general.

Mr McHugh: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I realise that the Minister's Department faces enormous pressures. Given those pressures on jobs and the budget, I ask the Minister to ensure that any job cuts are made equitably across regions rather than in more rural areas. Enterprises, such as the A5 would be of greatest importance —

Mr Speaker: I advise the Member to come to his question.

Mr McHugh: — for jobs at a time like this and in the foreseeable few years.

The Minister for Regional Development: I do not anticipate and am not planning for any job cuts in rural or urban areas. As I said, our commitment, and that of the Dublin Government, to the A5 project has remained steadfast.

Aviation

2. **Mr Burns** asked the Minister for Regional Development if he has any plans to introduce a regional aviation strategy. (AQO 326/11)

The Minister for Regional Development: Although airports are in my remit, aviation is a reserved matter, and it is currently not in my Department's power to prepare an aviation strategy. Having said that, I note the concerns expressed to me by Members and others who believe that the Executive should be able to exercise greater control over the strategic direction of aviation here. I propose to engage with my Executive colleagues to determine the extent of their interest in seeking the devolution of some or all reserved aviation powers. I recognise that the negotiation of any transfer of functions is likely to take time. In the interim, I am prepared to consider what measures may be taken within my powers to assist the future development of this important sector. I will, of course, take into account airport master plans that have already been prepared by the two largest airports and have been agreed in the context of 'The Future of Air Transport' White Paper.

Mr Burns: Our situation is that we have three airports that are all chasing the same business,

and it is essential that we have an aviation strategy. Does the Minister agree that there should be an international airport, and, if there were, there would be no need for Belfast City Airport to seek an extension to its runway? I urge the Minister to show some leadership on this aviation strategy.

The Minister for Regional Development: I think that the Member misunderstands the point that he is trying to put to me. *[Laughter.]* Other than, that is, to bat for his constituency. That is probably about the extent of it.

Mr McElduff: It is up in the air.

The Minister for Regional Development: Yeah, it is up in the air. *[Laughter.]*

I made it clear that we do not have that responsibility at the moment. I am prepared to examine what we can do in the interim and the long term. However, aviation strategy is not about trying to promote one airport over the other. The Member needs to be clear that we are talking about having some sense of direction over our airports. With the exception of the City of Derry Airport, which belongs to the council, the airports are private businesses. It is not about promoting one over the other or about getting involved in planning applications for Belfast City Airport's runway. It is about a general approach to airports and ensuring that we recognise that, as an island and an island economy, airports are very important gateways for us. We should ensure that they continue to thrive and to do business. Access to them is important, and we should improve it as best we can.

Mr Campbell: Whether looking at an aviation strategy or at how best to promote airports throughout Northern Ireland, does the Minister agree, as has been raised with him before, that public transport links to the airports are fairly crucial? Can he not examine more closely public transport links to Belfast City Airport, Belfast International Airport and Londonderry airport?

The Minister for Regional Development: I agree that public transport links to the airports are crucial. The developing regional development strategy will recognise that. Particularly in the case of rail connections, and given the volume of passengers who go to Belfast International Airport, Belfast City Airport and City of Derry Airport, the question is how affordable those are in the current circumstances and whether such expenditure of the public purse would

be justified. A general improvement in public transport, road connections and access is important. The questions are how that can be justified based on the numbers of passengers and whether the Executive have the funds to provide the sorts of connections that the Member and others have advocated.

Mr Kinahan: Following on from the Minister's comments about putting funds towards access to airports, has he made the case to those in Dublin that perhaps some of the funding that we are getting for the key roads should really be for the key roads and railways that are and could be to the airports in the North?

The Minister for Regional Development: The commitment to the two road projects, the A5 and the A8, was made by Dublin as part of the St Andrews Agreement discussions, at which the Member's party was represented. At that stage, I was not in the office that I am in now. That commitment has been given and has been reaffirmed on many occasions since, but I recognise the importance of the transport links and public transport links to all our airports. We will continue to strive to improve those transport links. I have had discussions about those with all the airport operators and many representatives in all the areas affected, and we will continue to do what we can with the limited finances that are available to us.

Ambulance Service

3. **Mr Frew** asked the Minister for Regional Development if his Department is aware that the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service reform and modernisation programme is being applied to patient care services and for his assessment of the potential impact this may have on the transport needs of socially isolated people in rural areas and the services provided through rural community transport partnerships. (AQO 327/11)

The Minister for Regional Development: The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety has advised me that the reform and modernisation programme that is being undertaken by the Ambulance Service has focused primarily on improving its emergency response performance and has had a minimal effect on its non-emergency patient care services. However, I am aware of suggestions that the changes might put pressure on rural services that are funded by my Department

Rural community transport partnerships are funded to provide services in rural areas to people with reduced mobility. Since December 2009, the terms of the dial-a-lift scheme have allowed members of the partnerships to use the service when going to hospitals within a partnership's operational area. However, the dial-a-lift scheme is not resourced at a level that would allow journeys to be taken routinely outside of a partnership's operational area.

Mr Frew: Does the Minister agree that his Department should investigate the impact that that will have on the socially isolated rural population and not leave it to the local community transport partnerships, which could struggle to pick up the slack that is currently being picked up by the patient care services?

The Minister for Regional Development: We have been speaking to the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, and, as I said in my initial answer, it has advised that the reform and modernisation programme is focused primarily on emergency responses and will have a minimal effect on its non-emergency patient care services. Rural transport services have limited resources. If they pick up some of the services for hospitals in their area and, although not routinely, outside their area, we will work with them. We will also want to ensure that there is no fall down in the rural transport service that the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety provides for people with mobility issues.

Mr Leonard: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. If transport can be provided for journeys to a local hospital, why can it not be provided for people with appointments at regional or specialist hospitals?

The Minister for Regional Development: The amount of money that is available from the rural transport fund is limited, and it is important that all members of the partnerships have the opportunity to avail themselves of the services that are provided. Journeys outside the operational area not only incur more costs but they mean that a bus and a driver are not available for local journeys. Shortly after the introduction of the dial-a-lift scheme in December 2009, we changed the terms of the scheme to allow outpatients to be taken to local hospitals. That was a pragmatic change that could be coped with. A change to allow routine

journeys to areas outside an operational area would not be sustainable.

3.15 pm

Mrs D Kelly: Does the Minister have any thoughts on whether all rural transport providers should have a fully integrated system? Does he have any plans to independently review rural transport providers' partnerships?

The Minister for Regional Development: We have been working quite closely with rural transport providers, and I recently attended their AGM in Downpatrick. We are having ongoing discussions and there have been some attempts to create mergers and greater partnerships to improve the services that are provided. We support the providers in trying to make a much more efficient rural public transport scheme.

Going forward, there are opportunities, which is why the reform of public transport is important. There are opportunities to look at areas in which we have transport provision for health and education and public transport provision, which come through my Department, to see where we can marry those services to get a more efficient and cost-effective provision that services the community, particularly the rural community, better.

Flooding: West Belfast

4. **Mr P Maskey** asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline any preparatory work which Roads Service and NI Water are undertaking to prevent a recurrence of last year's flooding in West Belfast. (AQO 328/11)

The Minister for Regional Development: Roads Service is responsible for the maintenance of the storm water carriageway gulleys in the public roads network and aims to clean all gulleys in urban areas twice a year. The policy ensures that a reasonable level of maintenance is carried out to the roads drainage system, while taking account of the Department's finite funding and staff resource. At present, ongoing minor drainage issues are being addressed by Roads Service in areas such as Suffolk Crescent, Donegall Road at the Park Centre, Derrin Pass and Glenhill Park.

I am aware that there is a need for a joined-up approach with other agencies. To that end, Roads Service continues to liaise with officials in NIW and in the Department of Agriculture and

Rural Development's Rivers Agency to address flooding issues. However, it is important to remember that in periods of severe, heavy rain, our gulleys, drainage systems and water courses can simply be overwhelmed in a short time by the intensity of such rainfall.

Mr P Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Flooding is a very important issue. During the floods last year and the year before, many homes in my constituency of West Belfast were greatly affected. Will the Minister go into a bit of detail on what arrangements are in place to ensure that effective inter-agency co-operation is happening on the ground?

The Minister for Regional Development: Following the widespread flooding in 2007, it was recognised that, during more severe emergencies in which a multi-agency response is required, wider co-ordination is necessary. That co-ordination can best be achieved by councils, through local resilience, to ensure integration with regional structures and co-ordination with the local response. To that end, the Belfast Resilience Forum has been established. Roads Service and NIW participate in telephone conferences to help to co-ordinate an inter-agency response to flooding events. Those conferences normally take place at regular intervals and continue throughout the event. Roads Service and NIW are stakeholders in the Belfast Resilience Forum and have been involved in the development of risk assessments. They have participated in various working groups and in a number of tabletop exercises planned for Belfast to help to prepare effective responses to major incidents in the Belfast area. In addition, Roads Service has worked closely with the PSNI and Belfast City Council on the preparation of a joint protocol.

Mr Bell: Will the Minister undertake to bring back to the House a look at the stretch of the Portaferry Road between Londonderry Park and Greyabbey? Good work was done, if memory serves me, about seven or eight years ago, to do with flooding and the defence walls —

Mr Speaker: Order. The question was specifically about flooding in West Belfast. However, the Member did quite well.

Mr Beggs: Will the Minister advise us what discussion he has had with the Minister of the Environment on urban intensification and how increased rates of water run-off are affecting

areas in Belfast that are already under stress? Has he discussed the particular need —

Mr Speaker: Order. The question is about West Belfast.

Mr Beggs: I did say “in Belfast”.

Mr Speaker: West Belfast?

Mr Beggs: In West Belfast and other areas.

Has the Minister discussed the need for sustainable urban drainage to minimise the risk of such flooding?

The Minister for Regional Development: I think that the Member is making a bid for the return of Chris McGimpsey. There are inter-agency approaches. I have not had direct discussions with the Minister of Finance and Personnel, because those matters are probably better dealt with by experts who know the issues involved. The agencies co-operate, not just in responding, which is very important, but in anticipation and prevention measures.

Task forces have looked at the issues in west Belfast and east Belfast, both of which have suffered from flooding in the past number of years. In south Belfast, the lower Ormeau area was susceptible to flooding. Fortunately, however, with the construction of the sewer tunnel and the change in how flooding alleviation measures work and drain the floodwaters into the Lagan, we have had no reoccurrence of that recently.

That said, a substantial sudden downpour can overwhelm all the systems that we construct, and we must recognise that. It is incumbent not just on the Department for Regional Development and its agencies, but on all the other agencies involved, including the Department of the Environment, the Rivers Agency, the police and others, such as Belfast City Council, to work together to respond to incidents and to anticipate where flooding may occur.

Planning has a major role, as a greater concentration of housing and a reduction in green-field space creates a much greater run-off, which can create problems. We have seen that happen across the city of Belfast, and, as the hills around the edges become developed, there is a much greater run-off into central areas. Those are all issues that need to be taken into consideration, and all Departments and agencies are working together on them.

Mr Speaker: I call Dr Alasdair McDonnell, and I am sure that the Member will stick to west Belfast.

Dr McDonnell: Thank you for your indulgence, Mr Speaker. *[Laughter.]* I am delighted with the Minister's answer and the approach that he took to solving flooding in West Belfast. The Minister mentioned the lower Ormeau area in his answer *[Laughter.]* He will be aware that the lower Ravenhill area and about half a dozen different locations in south Belfast were also devastated by flooding. Will the same measures extend across the city to wherever flooding takes place?

The Minister for Regional Development: I thought that it was a mistake to mention the lower Ormeau; I opened another door. *[Laughter.]* Of course those measures will apply. As I said in my answer to the previous question, there have been incidents of flooding across Belfast, and, in each case, both the response to the incidents and their anticipation were looked at.

I have held many meetings with representatives from different parts of Belfast. There are very intricate and complex matters with drainage in the city. Many of the rivers are underground, and questions of who feeds into those drainage systems and who owns and is responsible for maintaining them must be dealt with by all the agencies. People want those issues fixed so that they do not live under the threat of flooding. Therefore, the agencies must co-operate as best as they can to respond to the incidents. They must also anticipate future flooding problems and take action to alleviate them.

Mr Speaker: It is important that Members' supplementary questions are, as far as possible, related to the original question. However, if the Minister decides to open it out, as far as I am concerned, it is open season. *[Laughter.]*

Travelwise

5. **Mr B McCrea** asked the Minister for Regional Development how many companies have engaged with Travelwise to construct a travel plan. (AQO 329/11)

The Minister for Regional Development: I consider myself suitably warned, Mr Speaker.

Through its Travelwise initiative, my Department has assisted 13 organisations to develop workplace travel plans. Those organisations

include the Quays Shopping Centre in Newry; both universities in the North; a number of Departments and agencies; local councils; and several health and social care trusts. My officials continue to assist those employers in the implementation and monitoring of their workplace travel plans. Officials are engaging with five further employers to help them to develop a workplace travel plan.

Mr B McCrea: The Minister is in a feisty mood this afternoon. Having talked earlier about the 95% cut in the budget for cycling, will the Minister explain why his Department has failed to meet every target for investment in sustainable transport over the past decade?

The Minister for Regional Development: I can only answer for the past three and a half years. It is right that we have ambitious targets and if we do not meet them, we strive to do better the following year. We have faced serious budget restrictions this year, and we may well face more depending on what the Member's former party colleagues decide for us in Westminster on Wednesday. We certainly strive to achieve that.

The workplace travel scheme is important. It is not simply about creating infrastructures for cycling, for example. It is about encouraging people to car-share or to walk to work. In many organisations, 10% or 20% of staff live within 1 km of their place of work yet still travel there by car. It is not simply a matter of spending money on other types of infrastructure. It is about working with organisations to see how they can approach things differently and how large employers, such as the universities, health trusts or councils, can spread a sense of co-operation among their own workforce to try to reduce dependency on the private car. It is about creating a climate in which people look to alternatives.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answer. Will he elaborate a little on the Department for Regional Development's role in supporting the implementation of the workplace travel plan?

The Minister for Regional Development: I explained some of the things that we do in the last answer. We fund a programme of tailored, site-specific advice to employers who are willing to explore the benefits of a workplace travel plan. The specialist transportation planning consultants Atkins provided advice in conjunction with Travelwise staff. Travelwise's

budget for specific advice was £45,000 in 2009-2010, and it is approximately £80,000 in the current year. That is a good scheme. It has brought benefits in respect of reducing car usage and prompting more people to use public transport, walk or cycle, or to share cars when they are coming to large centres of employment. I encourage Members to encourage people in their constituencies to consult the Travelwise team to see whether there are opportunities for them to become involved in developing a Travelwise plan.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his reply. Will he provide us with detail on the number of people who have availed themselves of, and benefited from, the Travelwise scheme over the past four or five years?

The Minister for Regional Development: I do not have that detail to hand. It varies. As I said, we have been involved in 13 schemes, and another five are being developed. All those involve significant employers. The schemes beside me in the town of Newry, for instance, involve very significant employers. A 20% or 30% reduction in the number of cars being used by that workforce would have a very significant impact on the morning and evening traffic in the area. I will provide the Member with detail of how many people have taken up each of the 13 schemes. Monitoring is ongoing to ensure that people continue to follow through on the plan that has been developed, try to increase it, set targets for themselves, try to meet those targets and try to push on to meet even better targets.

Road Maintenance

6. **Mr Dallat** asked the Minister for Regional Development how the impending Budget cuts will affect the budget for road repairs.
(AQO 330/11)

The Minister for Regional Development: Roads Service is not yet in a position to make any judgement on the effect of the impending Budget cuts. The implications of the spending review for Departments here will not be known until sometime after the announcement of the outcome of the spending review on 20 October.

Mr Dallat: I am sure that the Minister agrees that there has been a long history of neglect of our roads down through the years, especially in times of crisis. Will the Minister give some

indication of how he intends to ring-fence the budget for the repair of roads? I ask in the interests of road safety.

The Minister for Regional Development: The Member is correct. He knows that the structural maintenance budget is not properly funded and has not been for some time; I have said that many times. It has relied on in-year monitoring rounds to provide more funding, usually at the tail end of the year. I suppose that one of the downsides of devolution is that, as Ministers are in their Departments full-time and spend their money much better, there is less money available to be used at the end of the year, particularly for Roads Service.

It is no secret. We produced a report that showed the level of underfunding in the structural maintenance budget. That underfunding has implications for roads right across the Six Counties, particularly rural roads. It is a priority of mine. Whatever the outcome of the comprehensive spending review, I will endeavour to ensure that we keep money there. As the Member said, road safety is a priority. That budget is needed to try to keep structural maintenance on roads at an acceptable level, but also to ensure that work is ongoing at that level right across the region and because of the economic impact that it has on small contractors. Whatever the outcome of the spending review, I will endeavour to ensure that as much funds as possible go into structural maintenance.

Adjourned at 3.30 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 19 October 2010

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Assembly Business

Mr Speaker: I want to say something about last Tuesday's proceedings, but, unfortunately, Mr Bell is not in the Chamber to be dealt with this morning.

Mr Bell is now in the Chamber. I raised a number of issues yesterday concerning the type of debate that took place in the Chamber and the type of debate that should take place in the Chamber, and I must say that the debate that I read in last Tuesday's Hansard report fell far short of what I expect from debates in the Chamber. As I said yesterday, I understand that debates can raise emotions in the House, and, on occasions, Members may say things that they should not say. However, on occasions, Members know exactly what they are going to say, and they end up insulting other Members. I would like Mr Bell to address that issue here this morning.

I often tell Members that the Speaker has a difficult enough job, but I must keep discipline in the House to protect its integrity, and I intend to do that while I sit here as Speaker.

Mr Bell: Mr Speaker, in the spirit of equality, I think that we had a genuinely rambunctious debate, and we had Dolores Kelly calling for the Minister of the Environment to be locked up. I am happy enough to withdraw any remarks that I made that could be perceived as offensive, and, in that spirit of equality, I ask for Dolores Kelly to withdraw her remark that the Minister of the Environment should be locked up.

Mr Speaker: Let me clarify the first issue first: Mr Bell, you are withdrawing whatever remarks that you made in the House.

As regards Dolores Kelly's remark, I spoke yesterday to Mr Poots, who came to see me. Certainly, he is very strong on the issue. My position is clear: I can deal only with what is

in the Official Report. Members know that. I have no doubt whatsoever that other Members may have heard Mrs Kelly's comment. However, it was certainly neither heard by the person who was in the Chair, nor was it recorded by Hansard. As I said to Mr Poots yesterday when he came to see me, had he raised the matter at the time, I have no doubt whatsoever that the comment would have been recorded.

I say to the House, as I do continually, that it gives me no pleasure to have to deal with such issues. I have to say that: it gives me no pleasure whatsoever. At the end of the day, I must deal with the issues as I see them, irrespective of other concerns. I hope that that serves as a warning to the whole House. Let us have some dignity in the House. Let us not end up insulting other Members. That is not what the House is about.

Mr Weir: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I, on behalf of the DUP, fully accept your rulings in the cases of both Mr Bell and Mrs Kelly. Therefore, the party does not seek that you take any further action on those matters. However, it believes that Mrs Kelly should reflect on what she does from now on.

Mr Speaker: I hear what the Member is saying. I hope that all Members reflect on what they say in the House. Sometimes, a Member makes a comment from a sedentary position and believes that it is neither recorded nor caught by the person who is in the Chair. I assure Members that, when I am in the Chair, if I catch any comment that a Member has made from a sedentary position, I will deal with it there and then. If any Member feels that something has been said that should not have been, they should rise to their feet immediately and point it out to the person who is in the Chair. That is how we deal with issues. Now, let us move on.

Private Members' Business

Enforcement of EU Animal Welfare Legislation

Mr Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for the debate. The proposer will have 10 minutes to propose the motion and 10 minutes to make a winding-up speech. One amendment has been selected and published on the Marshalled List. The proposer of the amendment will have 10 minutes to propose and five minutes to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who wish to speak will have five minutes.

Mr Elliott: I beg to move

That this Assembly notes with concern that EU animal welfare legislation, introducing a ban on the use of conventional cages for laying hens from 1 January 2012, may not be enforced equally across all EU member states; further notes that there is a danger that this will place Northern Ireland producers, who meet the highest EU agreed welfare standards, at a competitive disadvantage; and calls on the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to make representations to her counterparts in Westminster and Brussels in relation to this issue.

Mr Speaker, I am sure that the motion will not create all those internal emotions that you just referred to. Hopefully, you will not have to draw anybody's attention, either today or at a later stage, to the remarks that they make in the debate. Nonetheless, the motion is hugely important. It is vital to the poultry producers of Northern Ireland, and I am pleased to bring it forward on behalf of the Ulster Unionist Party. It was tabled in support of the local egg industry in the hope that a collective voice can be brought forth from the House today.

The poultry sector makes a hugely important contribution to the Northern Ireland economy and, indeed, to that across the United Kingdom. It is estimated that the industry generates more than £400 million in revenue each year and provides work for 4,500 people. The House should not overlook that. The growth of Northern Ireland's egg industry is a success story, with local processors pursuing new markets locally and in other parts of the UK, Ireland and throughout Europe. The Assembly must do everything possible to ensure that the sector's steady growth continues.

In just over one year's time, it is intended that changes that were announced 10 years ago, which seek to introduce a ban on the use of conventional cages for laying hens and became domestic legislation in 2003, will come into force in the European Union. I, like many others in the industry, am concerned that the ban will not be enforced equally throughout all European Union member states. As a result, there is a very real danger that the ban will place local producers at a competitive disadvantage. It is vital that we speak up now to afford the greatest protection to local producers and processors.

As Members know, there is an EU requirement on all egg producers to use alternative or enriched cage production systems by 1 January 2012. I am aware that British egg producers have invested heavily in the infrastructure that is needed to comply with the ban. I am encouraged that many have already made the necessary changes, and I pay tribute to our local producers for leading the way in complying with the ban. Denmark, Holland and Germany, as well as the rest of the United Kingdom, have led the charge in spending significant sums to upgrade their production systems. It would be counterproductive if the Commission were to grant a derogation to some countries in the European Union to extend the deadline and so allow member states that have failed to comply with the legislation more time to do so. That would put many member state producers who have complied at a competitive disadvantage.

My party colleague Jim Nicholson MEP has been campaigning for some time to ensure that the ban takes place in a uniform manner across the European Union and that it does not allow any extensions. He recently warned the European Commission that it must stick to its word and ensure a level playing field for the entire egg industry. Jim Nicholson also recently highlighted that the three main culprits could be Spain, Portugal and Poland. In fact, the Polish Government tried to extend their deadline to comply with the new regulations until January 2017. The Commissioner for Health and Consumer Policy, John Dalli, recently wrote to Jim Nicholson assuring him that he would resist pressure from those member states that are not sufficiently prepared for the ban and which will likely push for a derogation to the January 2012 deadline. However, it is critical that we back up the assurance that we have received with a strong voice to ensure that there is no rollback in that position.

In recent times, it has been unfortunate that the Agriculture Minister has not shown sufficient leadership in her Department when handling matters emanating from Europe. I hope that the Department will alter its course and engage more effectively on this issue with Europe. I hope also that the Minister will raise the matter with her counterparts throughout the rest of the United Kingdom so that we best serve our local producers and processors.

I will speak to the amendment. I am aware that poultry producers in the Republic of Ireland have received €16 million towards the cost of conversion, and that will help to offset the cost of complying with the directive. Many producers across Northern Ireland will look with envy at what the Irish Government have done in providing the egg industry in the Republic of Ireland with extra funding under the Irish rural development programme to make the required changes to enriched cages. Egg producers in Northern Ireland naturally fear that government grants for their counterparts across the border in the Irish Republic could put them at a disadvantage, not to mention the disadvantage that they will face if derogation is permitted for member states that have not sufficiently pursued conversion.

However, the Republic of Ireland has been able to do that because of the solid rural development deal that the Irish Government successfully negotiated in 2005. Sadly, in contrast, farmers across the United Kingdom, and specifically in Northern Ireland, have been left high and dry by the corresponding deal that Tony Blair negotiated for the UK. Although I appreciate that there may be funding pressures as a result of that, I call upon the Minister to make money available from her Department to assist poultry farmers to upgrade their systems in advance of the deadline.

We are supposed to be creating a level playing field across the European Union, with a concerted effort to safeguard animal welfare. It appears that producers in Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom may experience disadvantage as they have not received state aid to follow through with conversion and instead have met costs out of their own pockets and finances.

The Ulster Unionist Party is committed to positive engagement with the European institutions. Without a doubt, Northern Ireland,

as a newly devolved region in Europe, needs to take an increased interest in, and a smarter approach to, the laws and policies that emanate from the European institutions.

10.45 am

The motion intends that we attend to policies and engage with Europe early to ensure the best policy outcome for all the people of Northern Ireland. We need a more vigorous and strategic approach to developing policy at European level. The Assembly requires better early-warning systems for the European policy/legislative development process to anticipate the effects of EU directives and regulations on Northern Ireland and its citizens. All Northern Ireland's elected representatives must provide the strongest voice in Europe.

I look forward to hearing Minister Gildernew's remarks on the debate, and I am sure that other parties in the House have similarly spoken with representatives from the egg industry. The Ulster Unionist Party is keen to publicise the matter in the Assembly and with other representatives to ensure that the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development makes representations to her counterparts in Westminster and Brussels.

Mr Moutray: I beg to move the following amendment: At end insert

“; and further calls on the Minister to make money available from her Department through the farm modernisation scheme or another programme to assist poultry farmers to upgrade their systems in advance of the deadline.”

The egg industry in Northern Ireland, and, indeed, the UK, is a major strand of commerce that we do not want to see diminished in any way. Across the board, the concern is that banning conventional cages for laying hens might not be enforced equally across EU member states from 1 January 2010. That would disadvantage our egg industry, which has already incurred significant costs in meeting previous directives. Our amendment calls on the Minister and her Department to act.

The DUP has major concerns about the costs of the ban on conventional cages from 1 January 2010 and the fact that it will place a further financial burden on local producers. We do not want producers priced out of the market. Therefore, it is imperative that the Minister make money available from her Department

through the farm modernisation scheme or any other programme to assist the industry and the many who have still to upgrade their systems.

The capital cost of a new enriched colony unit is between £20 and £24 per bird, which could lead to a major capital spend for producers at a time when money is tight. In addition to the capital cost of establishing a new enriched colony unit, there is also an 8% increase in the cost of producing eggs in enriched cages compared to conventional cages. Those figures are alarming for the industry and for us as elected representatives who endeavour to support the industry and be its voice in the House. It goes without saying that, at this time of economic hardship, when many in the industry are struggling for survival, it is time that the Department take proactive action and make such funding available.

It is estimated that the poultry industry generates more than £400 million in revenue each year and provides work for some 4,500 people. There is no doubt that the poultry industry makes a huge contribution to the rural economy. Therefore it is vital that the Department do all in its power to assist in the implementation of the directive. As Mr Elliott has said, we need only look to our Irish counterparts who made funding available for their conversion. The Department here needs to send out a clear, unequivocal message to the industry to show clearly that the Government recognise the high cost of converting and the benefits of a modern, efficient, high-welfare industry.

Should the Department fail to make grants available, producers may not convert on time or may withdraw from the market, thereby forcing retailers, processors and wholesalers to source from abroad. The sector would struggle to recover from that, and it would force many out of the industry.

I challenge the Minister on a written answer that she gave seven months ago, on 12 March 2010, to Mr Elliott on her assessment of the impact of the 2012 welfare for laying hens directive on the poultry industry and what assistance her Department is offering those businesses that will be significantly affected by that directive.

The Minister's response was:

"I have looked widely at all options that would be available under the Rural Development Programme to support modernisation in the poultry sector. I

would draw your attention to the funding that will be available to poultry producers under the Farm Modernisation Programme (FMP) Tranche 2. In order that Tranche 2 will provide a good funding opportunity for poultry producers, I have asked that the list of eligible items be enhanced so that it includes a range of items that together will create a system that will meet the needs of poultry producers. The items will include plant, machinery and equipment; and other items that could contribute to modernising production systems for poultry producers."

The fact is that most poultry houses are on low-lying land, and given the land classification that the Minister insisted on using in that tranche of funding, those low-lying farmers are discriminated against.

In addition to the funding issue, we have to highlight and explore the fact that we could be facing fines to the tune of £100 million for non-compliance with regulations, yet a number of European countries have blatantly indicated that they will not comply with this regulation. It will be interesting to see whether they, too, will be penalised in such a way. The directive will cause great distress to egg producers, because non-compliance by other EU states will enable them to produce eggs much more cheaply, thereby leading to our prices being undercut.

There is potential for the UK to be flooded with eggs from EU member states with lower welfare standards. Ultimately, we would be powerless to stop eggs from being imported from countries that had not adhered to this EU directive. That it will not be enforced across EU member states means that eggs will be produced more cheaply due to lower welfare standards. Ultimately, that will threaten the competitiveness and viability of UK poultry farmers, who have worked hard to implement the new regulations.

I, therefore, leave the amendment before you: assistance through such funding will go some way to help our local producers and to ensure that they can comply.

Mr P J Bradley: I support the motion and the amendment. The proposers of each are rightly concerned that the regulatory requirements of Council directive 1999/74/EC may not be enforced equally across all member states. The motion goes on to express the fear that non-compliance elsewhere will place Northern Ireland egg producers at a competitive disadvantage.

The request in the motion for our Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to make representations to her counterparts in Westminster and Brussels is a natural road to go down, as London is the headquarters of the member state and Brussels is where the major decisions are made.

Mr Elliott and Mr Moutray have highlighted the acute difficulty facing the Northern Ireland egg industry. They did so in the almost certain belief that not all EU member states will demonstrate a 100% level of commitment to the new regulations. It is easy to understand why they should feel so concerned. Our experience shows that some member states, particularly France, Spain and Portugal, abide with only those farming regulations, or elements of regulations, that best suit their needs.

I do not differ from the proposers' concerns about competitive disadvantage. Indeed, I want to elaborate on a point raised by both Mr Elliott and Mr Moutray. In June, the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (DAFF) in the Republic introduced a poultry welfare scheme designed to facilitate egg producers in that jurisdiction and to allow them to comply with the new EU animal welfare standards, in particular the protection of laying hens.

The scheme in the South of Ireland will provide grant aid to the tune of 40% — let me repeat, 40% — to egg producers for the construction of new laying units, where the proposed investment will maintain the production capacity of any one holding. The grant aid payable will be reduced if the new unit proposals vary in any way from current production levels. Therefore, increasing or reducing capacity will have the effect of reducing the level of grant aid payable. The amount of grant aid on offer in the Republic will be determined by the level of investment.

The minimum amount of investment that is eligible for grant aid under the scheme is €10,000 for each holding. There is also a ceiling on expenditure, with the maximum amount of investment eligible for grant aid per holding under the scheme not exceeding €32 for each laying hen.

The threat presented by non-compliance in parts of Europe and the offer of 40% grant aid to egg producers down the road to assist them in modernising their poultry units so that they comply with Council directive 1999/74/EC is bound to create anxiety among egg

producers in the Six Counties. I have no doubt that the Minister is fully au fait with the different schemes in the Republic that come under the headings of the targeted agricultural modernisation scheme (TAMS) and the poultry welfare scheme, to which I referred.

I look forward to the Minister's reply to the debate and to her telling us what she expects her agriculture counterparts in Westminster and Brussels to do. I also want to hear what she expects our three MEPs to do to assist our beleaguered egg producers. Can our 13 active MPs — or, for that matter, the five stay-at-home non-active MPs — assist in any way? What is the Minister prepared to do to meet her obligations to the poultry farmers of Northern Ireland? That is of key importance.

Finally, above all else, I want the Minister to tell us about her plans to counteract the monetary advantage given to the poultry farmers in the Republic by their Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, Mr Brendan Smith TD. Let me put Minister Smith's encouraging offer in more parochial terms: what kind of reaction does the Minister expect from the egg producers of County Armagh, County Tyrone and County Fermanagh when they look despondently across the hedge into County Monaghan at new 40% grant aid funded poultry units being built on neighbouring farms?

Mr Lunn: I support the motion and hope that the Minister will take on board the fears that the farming community has expressed on the matter and convey its concerns to her counterparts in Brussels.

I intend to support the amendment, but I look forward to hearing the Minister's response to it. She might be able to explain from where the money might come. I do not know enough about the farm modernisation programme to comment on it. I am not from a farming background, although I have a little experience of egg laying and broiler houses from my previous work in the insurance industry. Having seen the conditions in which laying hens have been kept over the years, I welcome, from an animal welfare perspective, the new regulations that have been introduced by Europe. If such an intensive operation is necessary — in this day and age, it is — we should do all that we can, within reason, to ensure that our hens are kept in humane conditions. The new cage sizes and the option of non-cage systems are, therefore,

a welcome advance. It is good to see that Northern Ireland and GB farmers are embracing the change and are doing their very best to comply in time for the deadline.

The motion states the concern that the regulation might not be enforced equally across EU member states, and that could place our producers at a disadvantage in the market. If other countries are given a concession and are allowed to continue to produce and sell eggs from unenriched cage conditions, that is exactly what will happen. Frankly, in European terms, it would not be for the first time.

The noises that are coming from Europe are not helpful. The Belgian Minister with responsibility for agriculture is openly making the case for states that have “tried hard” — whatever that means — to implement the directive to be given a concession and allowed more time without being penalised. Poland has made a formal application for an extension of five years, which has at least been rejected for now. Given the progress made by the Poles to date — they have managed to get 100 units compliant out of around 600 — I wonder as to the extent of concession that they would need. It does not sound as though five years would be enough. Surely the important thing is that Europe hold the line on such matters and not give way to the demands of individual countries, unless those demands are absolutely justified.

In this case, the directive originally dates from July 1999 and became effective in 2003, with a final compliance deadline of 2012. Little as I know about farming matters, I would have thought a nine-year lead-in period probably to be sufficient.

11.00 am

I am not involved in agricultural matters, as I have said, but it seems that Europe's record in these matters is not good and that the concerns expressed in the motion are well-founded. My impression is that EU authorities have a track record of giving in to pressure from continental farmers. Mr Elliott mentioned that the Spanish and Portuguese, along with the Poles, may pose problems in this case, but no one has mentioned the French. At the moment, they are rioting over their pension age. I wonder whether we will see chicken riots in the Avenue des Champs-Élysées. I have a vision of 1 million chickens being let loose. We will see.

It is not reasonable that our farmers, who will comply, should be placed at a disadvantage to those who do not. Europe has been quick enough in the past to threaten the UK and to fine us in matters of farm-field mapping, and threats have been made recently over the nitrates directive. I hope that it will be equally diligent in its dealings with other EU countries for once. I look forward to hearing what the Minister has to say.

The Alliance Party supports the motion and the amendment.

Mr Speaker: Before I call Mr Simpson Gibson, I remind the House that maiden speeches are heard in silence and without interruption.

Mr Gibson: The last time that I spoke in this Chamber was 25 years ago. On that occasion, I was to the left of the Minister, at least as regards the position of my seat; I am not sure about the politics.

The egg industry is worth some £400 million, and it employs some 2,500 people. Therefore, it is timely that the matter is brought to the attention of the Assembly, and it is important that the Assembly express itself on the issue.

From my contact with farmers involved in the egg industry, I know that the sector is currently enduring great uncertainty. As a result of that, farmers are very nervous about their future. Historically, most farms in the Province engaged in a mixed enterprise. In a way, that protected them from the vagaries of the marketplace. If one commodity was down in value, another was up, and, therefore, the situation tended to even itself out. However, in recent decades, there has been a trend towards specialisation, which brought with it benefits but also greater vulnerability to market forces. That is the position that the egg industry and other parts of intensive agriculture find themselves in today.

The intensive sector, which includes broiler and pig production, is an important part of our agricultural industry. One of the reasons for its importance is that many of those farms are small in acreage and do not have the opportunity for grass-based or arable agriculture. Their viability depends on the intensive sector. If that sector goes down, those farms will go down with it. It is, therefore, vitally important.

The industry in the Province is not complaining about upgrading its facilities or measures

to improve the welfare of its stock. Indeed, farmers have an old maxim: if you are good to stock, stock will be good to you. That is not the problem. The industry is worried about the evolution of a situation in Europe that will create an uneven playing field. That is exactly what will happen after January 2012, if a derogation is offered to several of the European countries that are lagging behind in upgrading their facilities. If that happens, and I fear that it will, farmers who have invested in the new enriched cages will be at an immediate disadvantage because, obviously, the costings that they work on will be considerably different.

That would be a travesty of justice for those who have made the effort and invested, not just in the new cages, but in new housing. Those who have made that investment are entitled to reap the rewards of it. It may be that the only way to bring that about is to brand or code the eggs, if possible, in order to market them in a way that will attract a premium price in the marketplace. Alongside that, a ban on the trading of eggs between member states could be considered, although I suspect that the law underpinning the common market may rule that out.

This is an important industry, especially for those whose agricultural business is based on smallholdings.

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

Mr Gibson: Let the message go out loud and clear that these producers have the full support of the Assembly.

Mr Armstrong: I support the motion and the amendment. One weakness of European legislation is that, although it is often passed with the best intentions, it can have unintentional and unfair consequences. It only works when common laws and standards are properly and consistently enforced throughout the area in which they are supposed to apply.

Some time ago, I was approached by representatives of egg producers in Northern Ireland who were concerned that the standards of food safety and animal welfare being adhered to in the United Kingdom were in advance of those being enforced in the rest of the EU. In particular, there was concern that, although all British Lion egg producers have committed themselves to moving their caged hens from conventional cages to the more welfare-friendly

enriched egg cages from 1 January 2012, it is well known that some other EU member states are highly unlikely to be able to meet the deadline. Some are actively seeking extensions to it.

It is absolutely outrageous that egg producers in Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK, Denmark, Holland and Germany, who have obeyed the rules and spent a great deal of money to comply with the EU regulations, should be disadvantaged by having their profitability weakened and jobs put at risk. This is exactly the sort of case that creates criticism and ill-feeling towards Europe and EU regulations. It is particularly galling that we are asking our Agriculture Minister to intervene and demand that the EU enforces its directives at a time when Northern Ireland is facing massive fines from the European Commission over farm payments because of inaccurate maps.

All we are asking for is consistency of approach. Regulations should apply and be enforced across the entire EU. If a blind eye is to be turned to some other country's inability to meet standards over egg production, farmers in Northern Ireland will quite rightly ask why the same cannot apply to the mapping problems. In this particular instance, we have time to make representation to Europe in order to ensure that the laws and regulations that they have introduced are properly enforced. I urge our Minister to do just that.

Mr Bell: This should be a very exciting day for Northern Ireland. We are all looking to the United States of America to see what jobs and investment could come. However, when we look towards extra jobs, we should also look towards how we can secure and enhance the jobs that we already have, particularly in the poultry industry. If someone was to come along and announce that they had something new for Northern Ireland that would bring £400 million of investment and 4,500 jobs, we would, rightly, fall over ourselves, not only to get it, but to protect it. We have that here in Northern Ireland with our poultry industry, as the Chairman of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development so ably proposed.

It is worthwhile considering the depth and content of what my colleague from Strangford Simpson Gibson said; I pay tribute to his excellent maiden speech. He is known throughout Strangford as a gentleman of the foremost Christian integrity. We are delighted to

have him here and delighted that he made such a robust contribution about an industry that he knows like the back of his hand.

The first issue with which we have to deal is that of a level playing field. I have been very sceptical of the European Union; its history in creating a level playing field is ignominious, right back to the days of lamb and France and everything else. We do not need to go over its history piecemeal. If derogations are given, it will appear, to paraphrase Orwell, that all farmers are equal, but some farmers in Europe in the poultry industry are more equal than our farmers. That is simply not fair.

The third issue is gold-plating. Some of us raised that in a meeting with Sir Kim Darroch in Brussels because several MEPs said that although 14 pages were added to the European directive when it went to London, only four pages were added when it went to Paris or Madrid or wherever else. Gold-plating is recognised as a problem. It was brought directly to the attention — I did it myself — of Sir Kim Darroch, and it is understood. We are told that getting our additional pages to the regulation right will prevent further fines down the line, but any examination of the evidence shows that that has not always been the case.

We all want to defend our poultry industry, and I welcome the number of Members here, although some Members who were on the radio this morning calling for extra hours in the Assembly are not here to defend the poultry industry. Is it fair for our poultry industry to take an increase of 8% if that is not applied equally across the field? Some small holdings and family units in which sons and daughters work are completely reliant on the regulation. If we misfire on this one and derogations are given, those small holdings will become unviable, and not just for today or tomorrow, because we will never regain the industry that we have now. That is why it is vital to bring to this debate full and unequivocal support for the poultry industry, as is evidenced through the amendment.

I know that it is difficult in any financial circumstances for the Minister to see what can be done; however, we want a response to assist the poultry industry and a solution to what is an obvious problem.

Mr Savage: I am delighted to speak in today's debate and to support the egg industry here in Northern Ireland. Flowing from the debate, it is

imperative that we provide one voice in full and absolute support of an industry that employs many thousands of people.

The debate is as timely as it is important. There remains time to influence the European Commission, alongside colleagues from England, Scotland and Wales, to ensure that derogation is not permitted. My understanding is that the UK, along with Germany and Denmark, has adhered to the letter of the law in a timely fashion.

11.15 am

We appear more than ready for the ban on keeping laying hens in conventional cages. It is regrettable that the approach of other countries such as Poland and Spain has been slack and that, apparently, they will not meet the 2012 deadline. I put my dissatisfaction with that position on the record. Those countries have had the opportunities to come into line and to adhere to the 2012 ban. To allow an uneven playing field to exist because some countries have not adopted as proactive an approach as they should have is not how the European Union should operate. We can be sure that a Northern Ireland farmer who was slow to implement a European directive would have the book thrown at him from every direction and would have points deducted from his single farm payment. That is why we in Northern Ireland must have a level playing field.

Our egg industry is a growing sector, and, in this time of economic hardship, we must act to support it and to secure, as I said, a level playing field for the sale of the industry's produce. It is crucial that the House unite in support of the local egg industry. We have the highest standards of food quality in Europe, far exceeding any of the regulations set down by Brussels. We must ensure that eggs imported from continental Europe adhere to the same high standards to which our local poultry sector adheres. We need to act now to support our local industry.

I look forward to hearing the Minister's comments and to her guaranteeing that she will work with her colleagues in Westminster, Brussels and further afield in lobbying against the introduction of any derogation. Mr Speaker, everybody in the House must support the motion. We have an industry of which we are proud. It is one that has withstood every test presented by European legislation. It is an

important industry, and to allow other countries to bring produce into Northern Ireland without meeting the regulations that our farmers have to adhere to would be very disheartening. I know that our Minister will do all in her power to protect the industry in Northern Ireland.

To have a hen produce eggs in a completely healthy environment is effective for both sides involved in the industry. The farmer achieves productivity and the industry meets all the legislation laid down. Our farmers have nothing to hide. However, the one thing that we come up against from time to time is Europe's red tape. If we get a level playing field, we can compete with any country in the world. We urge the Minister to ensure that we have that level playing field.

Mr Doherty: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I was late arriving because I was in Committee, and it is hard to be in two places at once. I speak in support of the motion and the amendment. There are huge concerns that, when 2012 comes around, there may not be a level playing field in dealing with all the issues; that other EU countries will not be ready to implement the resolutions; and that that will militate against egg production here at home.

My dialogue with the Minister and Committee members assures me that the Department is very conscious of the issues and the potential disadvantage to the industry here, and will undertake to lobby Westminster and Brussels to ensure that our industry is not adversely affected. However, the difficulty caused by EU legislation being implemented by some states and delayed by others means that we very much depend on the good work and the goodwill of the Department in standing up for the industry here at home.

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew): Go raibh míle maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank Tom Elliott, Billy Armstrong, George Savage and John McCallister for tabling the motion, which raises the important issue of the ban on the use of conventional cages for laying hens from 1 January 2012, and I welcome the opportunity to debate the issue in the Chamber. I also thank William Irwin and Stephen Moutray for tabling the amendment, which I will come to later.

I shall begin by explaining the background to the EU-wide ban on conventional battery cages for laying hens. Council Directive 1999/74/EC, which was made in 1999, lays down standards

for the welfare of laying hens. The directive bans the keeping of hens in unenriched — that is, conventional or, as they are usually known, battery cages — from 1 January 2012. Furthermore, the directive made it illegal to bring such cages into use from January 2003, and, as far back as 2002, the legislation was transposed into domestic legislation with the Welfare of Farmed Animals (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2002.

The ban on conventional cages was introduced as a result of scientific evidence that the welfare of hens kept in conventional battery cages is inadequate, and the subsequent Commission report, which was adopted in January 2008, concluded:

"There is substantial evidence that banning the use of conventional battery cages for laying hens could considerably improve the health and welfare of these birds."

Therefore, it upheld the reasons for the ban.

In 2008, the Commission made it clear that the deadline for the ban would remain and that producers should start to phase out the use of conventional battery cages as soon as possible in order to meet it. In separate legislation, the EC Egg Marketing Standards Regulations, the marketing of class A eggs produced in conventional battery cages in the EU is effectively prohibited from 1 January 2012. Although the egg industry across the EU has been aware of the directive for many years, concerns were raised recently that egg producers in a number of member states will not be in a position to convert to enriched or alternative systems by the deadline. Strict enforcement of the directive could, therefore, lead to a shortage of eggs, which has led many to believe that the directive will not be universally adhered to from January 2012.

On 30 August 2010, the poultry and egg industry presented a report to the European Parliament's Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development that included an estimate from the representative body in the EU for egg packers, traders and processors that 30% of the EU layer flock will still be in the traditional cage system by 1 January 2012. As we heard, most of the non-compliant producers are expected to be from a range of countries, including Spain, Italy, Poland and Hungary. The report also stated that a number of member states, including Belgium,

Denmark, Finland, Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden, are already fully compliant.

I welcome the fact that some egg producers here have already taken the step to invest in alternative or enriched cage systems and are, therefore, compliant with the directive's requirements post-January 2012. Some 79% of producers here have fully or partly adopted alternative or enriched cage systems. Therefore, it is vital that the egg producers who have invested in alternative or enriched cage systems are protected from cheap, illegally produced eggs imported from other member states. I am conscious of growing pressure from consumers for a move to free-range and other alternative egg production systems, and, indeed, I am aware that some major British retailers do not stock eggs or egg products that are produced in cages. Therefore, I recognise the important steps that the local industry has taken in recent years to develop alternative systems, such as free-range, organic and barn, which now account for almost 40% of our current laying capacity.

The Commission has consistently stated its position that the directive's requirements will be law and that member states must comply with it. The Commission has reiterated that, in the event of non-compliance, it will be down to individual member states to ensure that compliance and infraction proceedings are undertaken. Therefore, I have been clear that producers must comply with the conventional cage ban from 1 January 2012. Under the Council directive, my Department is required to begin inspection and enforcement action, and it will pursue the normal enforcement process, beginning with education and informing producers, proceeding to warnings and, where necessary, prosecutions.

Those in the industry who are already, or expect to be, compliant are pressing DARD to ensure that implementation of the ban is effective. It is also important to note that action must also be taken under the egg marketing regulations to prevent the sale of eggs produced in conventional cages.

I am also pressing the EU Commission to ensure that our local producers who comply are not disadvantaged; that has been the tenor of this debate. When Croatia proposed its entry into the EU, it was suggested that that country may require derogation to comply with the 2012 cage ban. At the EU Commission's special

committee on agriculture in April 2010, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) supported the French stance to oppose that request as it was unfair to other member states.

I am also aware that, as several Members mentioned, Poland made a plea to delay the enforcement of its ban for five years until 2017. However, the EU Commission rejected that request, having advised that it would be a major step backwards and would undermine EU law. At present, it is clear that the EU Commission is not contemplating extending the deadline of 1 January 2012. I have been lobbying hard to ensure that that is the case. On 8 March this year, I wrote to Jim Fitzpatrick MP, the then Minister of State for Food, Farming and Environment, to press DEFRA to work closely with the EU Commission on the issue. In that letter I said that I did not support the Polish proposal. The issue was then raised by Hilary Benn, the then Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, when he held an introductory bilateral meeting in March with the EU Commissioner for Health and Consumer Policy, John Dalli. My officials have continued to press that issue with DEFRA.

The new DEFRA Minister of State, Jim Paice, wrote to EU Commissioner Dacian Cioloș on 16 September about concerns relating to possible non-compliance with the EU-wide ban on the keeping of laying hens in conventional cages from January 2012. In his letter to the commissioner, Minister Paice confirmed the commitment to comply with the deadline to have phased out the use of conventional cages as set out in the directive. He advised that the industry said that lion code subscribers will be ready for 1 January 2012 and that no conventional, cage-produced, eggs will be marketed as "lion" from that date. He recommended that additional measures be put in place to prevent market disturbance and urged the EU Commission to begin work on seeking a practical enforcement to manage the transition across Europe.

Minister Paice also recommended that further consideration be given to protecting those EU producers who are compliant and achieve the desired welfare improvements by the deadline. Proposals included a time-limited inter-community trade ban on eggs and egg products produced by hens housed in conventional cages so that those eggs and egg products can only be marketed in

the member state of production; and an amendment to the EU egg marketing regulations to make traceability easier and to distinguish between eggs produced in enriched systems and those produced in conventional cages.

It is vital that if no extension is provided to the conventional cage ban, we protect our industry from potential competition from cheaper eggs imported from non-compliant member states. I continue to press DEFRA to secure action from the EU Commission and other member states on that issue, and I am confident that ministerial colleagues in the South and in England, Scotland and Wales support that approach. I will raise the issue with the EU Commission at the earliest opportunity to ensure that local egg producers are not disadvantaged by imports of illegally produced eggs from other member states. In addition, I will write to other member states to urge them to support effective measures to protect producers who have complied with the conventional cage ban.

In light of the amendment, I will now talk about funding to assist poultry farmers. I appreciate the difficulties facing the egg-laying sector and the poultry sector generally at this time. I am aware of the cost of converting to new systems of egg production, having had useful and constructive discussions with producers, industry representatives and MLAs in October 2009. Therefore I have looked widely at all the options available under the rural development programme (RDP) to support modernisation in the poultry sector.

I have examined whether it would be possible to provide funding under specific measures such as the EU meeting standards measures to help egg producers to invest in the conversion to enriched cages. However, the maximum funding permitted under the meeting standards measures would be no more than 3% of the total investment needed. As that would be such a small proportion of the total investment, it would not be possible to get a business case to succeed.

Furthermore, one of the main problems in attempting to provide funding is that it would not be possible to provide it retrospectively to those egg producers who have already made the necessary changes. That would be unfair to those who have already secured finance and are therefore carrying additional overheads

that might place them at a competitive and commercial disadvantage.

However, I have ensured that funding will be available to poultry producers under tranche two of the FMP, and, last week, I announced the reopening of the programme. Tranche two of the farm modernisation programme will provide an opportunity for poultry producers to secure funding up to a maximum payment of £4,000 per applicant. The list of eligible items has been extended to include a range of items that could contribute to modernising production systems for poultry producers, including egg packers, egg-tray stackers, ventilation fans and vermin-proof bulk feed bins.

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

11.30 am

Funding in the region of £1 million was made available to the egg industry here through the processing and marketing grant scheme, and two local egg packers benefited from that scheme. The farm nutrient management scheme also assisted poultry farmers by providing funding to help them to comply with the nitrates directive. As we are all aware, resources are extremely limited at this time, and the focusing of funding on one sector will restrict the resources that are available to other sectors.

As many Members pointed out, I am aware that DAFF provides funding of €16 million to its egg-layer sector. That funding came from ending its installation aid scheme and early retirement scheme. The additional funding was announced as part of a package that arose from the CAP health check agreement, which included additional funding for the South through increased compulsory modulation rates. I would have loved to have been able to provide support of that nature, but that option was not open to me because similar additional funding is not available to the North or to Britain. Scotland, England and Wales do not provide funding to their poultry sector for conversion to enriched cages, and, unfortunately, I am in the same position. That is probably down to the poor deal that Britain negotiated for the rural development programme in comparison with that in the South. Tom Elliott said that he looks with envy across the hedge; there is a wee reality check in that statement.

I am aware that some egg producers have concerns about the availability of bank lending

to support investment for the conversion to enriched cages. I met local banks last year to discuss the impact of the credit crunch on rural businesses and farming and asked them to look sympathetically at proposals where business plans are viable and where Government support has been agreed. I also encouraged farmers to discuss financial concerns with their bankers at the earliest opportunity and to explore all available options.

My Veterinary Service officials provided egg producers with information about the detail of the laying hens directive, and it is essential that egg producers here are fully aware of the requirements of the European directive at this time, as, over the coming months, producers will decide whether to convert their cage systems. I understand that the Commission has announced that it will hold a multi-stakeholder meeting to discuss the state of play on implementation and the tools that are available to ensure the smooth phasing-out of conventional cages by the deadline. That meeting is expected to take place in January 2011 in Brussels. Representatives from our local industry will be invited to attend, and I encourage them to become involved to ensure that local voices are heard.

I am also aware that some producers are considering whether to convert their cage systems and that some are in the process of planning for conversion. I advise producers who still use conventional or battery cage systems that they need to decide soon whether to convert or replace their existing systems. The longer that producers delay their decision, the shorter the time frame for them to plan and to make the necessary changes. My officials are available to provide egg producers here with information about the directive and how it might affect their business as they decide whether to convert to enriched systems.

I hope that the points that I covered in my response give Members some assurance about the positive steps that I took within the available options. I assure the House that, since coming into office, I have been active in helping Brussels to understand the challenges to our industry here. A full-time member of DARD staff is located in Brussels on a permanent basis; mine is the only Department that has such a position. We keep a close eye on all areas of agriculture and fish policy development. I have requested proposals from my permanent

secretary about how the Department's operation in Brussels could be further improved, and we work closely with the South, which has made an art form of engagement with Brussels, and look at what it has done.

I am very keen that our industry should not be disadvantaged in any way, that there should be no competitive disadvantage and that —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Minister, your time is up.

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: Gabh mo leithscéal. I also support the amendment, and I am sorry that I was not able to allude to it in my remarks.

Mr Irwin: This is an important issue for egg producers across Northern Ireland, many of whom have invested heavily in recent times in light of the impending ban on conventional cages. A number of Members, including Mr Elliott, Mr Gibson and Mr Moutray, pointed out that the industry generates £400 million a year for the economy and employs some 4,500 people.

Once again, with its ever-growing reach and ever-meddling hand, Europe is interfering in our production methods when no such interference is required. Food production in the United Kingdom is of the highest standard across all sectors, yet EU law after EU law appears only to want to put a brake on any progress that has been made in the marketplace. At the same time, through EU mismanagement, it appears that such laws aim to reward countries with poorer production standards. We have seen that in many sectors, and, at this time, egg producers are the focus of attention. Indeed, Mr Moutray pointed out that the cost of production under the enriched cage system will add an extra 8% to the production cost.

Figures that were released recently show that, when the ban comes into force in 2012, around 83 million eggs that are produced across Europe will be deemed illegal as they will not have been laid in conditions that are satisfactory under the 2012 legislation. It is an indictment on the EU's planning for the ban that although the directive has been in the pipeline for some 10 years, over a third of producers across the EU will not have complied. That is where I have a massive problem with EU directives and compliance across the EU. Those EU member states that plan ahead, such as, in this instance, the UK, are then punished and penalised by those that drag their heels.

As a result, they have an unfair production-cost advantage.

Producers whom I have spoken to know only too well what will happen if the countries where little or no preparation has been made are allowed an extension. They will have an unfair advantage over UK producers and will undercut them severely. That is wrong in the extreme.

The cold fact is that, when people come to buy to eggs in supermarkets, I doubt that, when they hunt up and down the aisles for the box of eggs that is on their shopping list, they are looking for eggs that have come from a hen that has had more room to move around than one that has been cramped. That is the reality of the situation, and it presents a huge problem for our sector. It will be impossible to tell an egg that has been laid in an enriched environment from a conventionally laid one unless the EU permits a marking system to tell them apart.

I am also aware of those in the industry here who have still to finalise their changeover from producing conventional eggs. That has, of course, been a challenge of great expense. Therefore, I appeal to the Minister to permit the use of funds to help producers to meet those requirements. A number of Members, including Mr Gibson, Mr Bell and Mr Doherty, expressed concerns about there not being a level playing field, and that is a concern for many of us.

At a meeting last year with industry representatives, the Minister referred to the processing and marketing grant scheme as a way of accessing funds. However, it remains questionable whether that scheme was specific enough to allow significant assistance. Earlier, the Minister said that the farm modernisation scheme made funding available to egg producers. As a farmer, I doubt that, under the new rules for the application process, many of those producers will be able to avail themselves of any funding. Indeed, those producers have no option but to convert their cages, but I have little doubt that they stand little chance of receiving funding from anyone here. Therefore, I disagree with the Minister on that point.

It boils down to the fact that the egg industry needs to be supported more substantially through this transitional period. I urge the Minister to devise a scheme that is easily accessible to the industry in the shorter term to help to meet the 2012 deadline.

I also urge the Minister, along with her colleagues in DEFRA and our MEPs, to redouble her efforts in order to ensure that our producers are not left at a serious disadvantage in the marketplace, given that there will be an 8% increase in the cost of production under the enriched scheme.

I support the amendment.

Mr Kinahan: I am delighted at the level of engagement in the House on the issue. The Assembly must support the local industry and farmers, especially since they are leading the way on so many matters. We must ensure that they are not penalised; rather, they should be rewarded for their efforts. Producers and processors who have made large investments need a high degree of certainty that there will be a level playing field for them to be able to compete in Europe. We heard many Members say that today. The farming industries in Northern Ireland, across the UK and in other member states should not be penalised for pushing ahead with implementing the changes required by the directive when others have not done so.

Animal welfare is a core value for consumers and farmers alike. A growing market for animal welfare-friendly products clearly exists. The poultry sector makes an important contribution to the local rural economy in Northern Ireland and, more widely, across the United Kingdom. Indeed, the poultry sector, along with the wider agricultural industry, is an industry of public good, serving rural dwellers and those living in more urban areas. The spirit of the motion is to support local producers and processors and to encourage the Assembly to engage on European matters in a timelier manner than perhaps has been the case to date. As my colleague alluded to earlier, the Department's most recent calamity regarding the disallowance of single farm payments has not showered it in glory.

I am pleased that an amendment has been tabled to the motion. I now turn to the points raised by various Members. The main starting point for Tom Elliott, my colleague and party leader, was that we should have a collective voice and speak in support of today's motion and amendment. Mr Elliott praised the industry for investing heavily and leading the way throughout Europe. He called on the Minister to show leadership with her counterparts in the UK and to ensure that we are not left struggling in

Northern Ireland. He also wants her to engage with Europe — we heard that she is doing that — and to keep up the representations in Brussels.

Stephen Moutray, who moved the amendment, called on the Minister to be proactive in ensuring that funding is in place for our farmers, especially since Ireland has funding of a different type. Mr Moutray raised the fear that many farmers may withdraw from that market if it becomes too difficult for them.

P J Bradley supported the motion and the amendment. He pointed out that the Republic has a poultry welfare scheme, which gives it a greater strength over us. He also said that he was looking forward to hearing about what the Minister is doing, which I will go into later.

Trevor Lunn welcomed the welfare rules on humane conditions. However, he raised concerns over the fact that various European countries are not up to date in what they are trying to do and said that Europe must hold the line. He also said that the record in Europe was not good.

I congratulate Simpson Gibson on his maiden speech. It was clear and loud, and many of us could learn from that. I am always intrigued by those Members who can see their notes well enough when they are standing to be able to read them. I was, therefore, going to say that his view was a good, long-sighted one.

Mr McNarry: He is wearing glasses.

Mr Kinahan: I need glasses.

Mr Gibson mentioned that what is going on at the moment means that there may be an uneven playing field and that we must ensure that that is not the case.

My colleague Billy Armstrong said that we must ensure that those who have spent money are not disadvantaged, and he, too, raised concerns over the consistency of the EU's approach.

11.45 am

Jonathan Bell said that we must secure and enhance jobs, and he also referred to keeping the playing field level. He showed concern that smallholdings would become unviable.

My colleague George Savage said that we had made ourselves more than ready here but that, in times of economic hardship, we must make sure that we support egg farmers. He acknowledged that the Minister was doing all

that she could but said that we must make sure that the playing field is level. He also mentioned the mass of red tape that is thrown at us.

Pat Doherty also raised the matter of keeping the playing field level.

The Minister gave us useful details on the background to the rules and talked about how we must move towards enriched cage systems. She said that there was a move in the market towards free-range, organic and barn production. However, she said that, in 2012, 30% of producers would still be using the old cage system. The Minister outlined much of her efforts, in the UK and with her European counterparts, and where she is keeping the pressure on. For that, we are extremely grateful. She also outlined the difficulty with funding, highlighting and, sadly, criticising the deal that the British Government achieved, which is poor in relation to how the Irish had done. However, we welcome the various types of funding that she outlined. I hope that what William Irwin said will not be true and that some farmers will be able to get funding, whether that is from the farm management programme or the many other programmes that the Minister listed.

William Irwin spoke to the amendment and talked about the meddling hand of the EU. He said that he is concerned that what the legislation is really doing is adding 8% to costs and, possibly, making some 83 million eggs illegal. He raised concerns throughout about whether local egg producers would be able to get funding and called on the Minister to devise a scheme that would help them.

The Ulster Unionist Party stands by its motion and supports the amendment. We must make sure that egg producers here are treated equally and fairly. I leave the motion with the House.

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

Main Question, as amended, put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly notes with concern that EU animal welfare legislation, introducing a ban on the use of conventional cages for laying hens from 1 January 2012, may not be enforced equally across all EU member states; further notes that there is a danger that this will place Northern Ireland producers, who meet the highest EU agreed welfare standards, at a competitive disadvantage; calls on

the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to make representations to her counterparts in Westminster and Brussels in relation to this issue; and further calls on the Minister to make money available from her Department through the farm modernisation scheme or another programme to assist poultry farmers to upgrade their systems in advance of the deadline.

Knife Crime

Mr Deputy Speaker: Before we begin, I remind Members that they have a general duty to behave responsibly to ensure that nothing that they say may prejudice any future proceedings that may be taken in relation to these matters.

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

Mr Easton: I beg to move

That this Assembly calls on the Minister of Justice to introduce tougher sentences for persons convicted of knife crime; and further calls on the Minister to bring forward a strategy to take knives off our streets in the wake of recent attacks and violence involving knives.

The motion addresses the growing problem of knife crime in our society. The most up-to-date statistics, for 2009-2010, show that knives and sharp instruments were used in 938 incidents in Northern Ireland, compared with the previous year, 2008-09, in which 908 serious incidents in Northern Ireland involved knives or sharp objects. That represents an increase of 30 incidents following the introduction of a series of measures in the wake of the horrific murder of Thomas Devlin off the Somerton Road in north Belfast in 2005.

The 15-year-old was stabbed to death a short distance from his home, and his parents campaigned for an increase in the punishment for knife crime, which led to a series of measures, including a knife amnesty in 2006, during which almost 900 knives were handed over to the authorities.

Following a consultation exercise by the Northern Ireland Office in 2006, tougher measures were introduced under the Criminal Justice (Northern Ireland) Order 2008, which extended the maximum penalty for a range of offences relating to knives and weapons, including possession of, manufacturing and selling knives or offensive weapons. Under the Order, penalties were increased for offences relating to crossbows; the possession of a knife in a public place; the possession of a knife on school premises; the possession of an offensive weapon; the manufacture, sale and unlawful marketing of certain knives; and the sale of knives to persons

under 18 years of age. Prior to the legislation, 16-year-olds were permitted to purchase knives. Imprisonment for the possession of an illegal knife had carried a maximum sentence of six months, which was increased to 12 months under the 2008 Order. I believe that that should be increased further to 24 months.

Questions may be asked about what is and is not deemed to be an offensive or illegal weapon. A Swiss army knife, where the blade folds in, is legal, providing that the blade does not exceed 3 inches in length. However, when a Swiss army knife is used in an offensive or threatening manner, it is deemed an offensive weapon and is subject to a penalty.

Mr Bell: I thank the Member for North Down for giving way. Is it not vital to know and understand exactly which knives are illegal so that young people who go out for a night's entertainment and who carry a knife know the exact consequences of what they are doing? The illegality of each weapon should be clearly defined.

Mr Easton: I thank my colleague for his intervention. It is imperative for some sort of education to be introduced so that our young people, especially those of school age, know exactly which knives are illegal and which are not. The following knives are illegal: a flick knife, where the blade is hidden inside the handle and shoots out when a button is pressed; a butterfly knife, where the blade is hidden inside a handle that splits in two around it; and a disguised knife, where the blade is hidden inside something, such as a belt buckle or a fake mobile phone.

An offensive weapon is described in law as:

"any article made or adapted for use for causing injury to the person, or intended by the person having it with him for such use by him or by some other person."

The police have a range of stop and search powers for people whom they suspect of carrying knives or offensive weapons. They can stop and search a person or vehicle where they have reasonable grounds for suspecting that they will find any items relating to the offence of having an article with a blade or sharp point in a public place, including school premises.

It is an offence to sell a knife, axe or any other bladed or sharply pointed article to a person under the age of 18, and the offence carries a

maximum penalty of up to 12 months' imprisonment and/or a fine. It is illegal to market a knife in a way that indicates or suggests that it is suitable for combat or is otherwise likely to stimulate or encourage violent behaviour. Naming, describing, packaging or advertising a knife as suitable for combat is prohibited, and the maximum penalty for such an offence is up to six months' imprisonment and/or a fine of £5,000 on summary conviction, or four years' imprisonment on conviction or indictment.

Education and awareness is a policy of the Department of Justice and, to an extent, the Department of Education. When I was a young boy in first form, which was a long time ago, the police came in once a week to deliver an hour-long course on police studies. Such courses should be reintroduced into our schools, as they can lead to children respecting the police and understanding our laws. That would be a positive way forward, and the Minister might look at that in conjunction with the Department of Education.

Mr Spratt: Does the honourable Member agree that many knife crimes today take place in a domestic situation and that some of the most serious incidents, including murder, have taken place in a domestic situation? Such situations are very difficult for the PSNI to deal with, given that all our homes have domestic knives that are available to be used in such incidents.

Mr Easton: I thank the Member for his intervention. I agree totally with what he said about those incidences of domestic violence that have involved knives. Regardless of whether knife crime takes the form of domestic violence or a young person carrying a knife on the street, we need sufficiently strong deterrents to stop it, if possible.

On the same date that the amnesty was announced four years ago, a public information campaign sponsored by the PSNI, the Northern Ireland Policing Board, the Department of Education and the Northern Ireland Office commenced. That campaign was aimed primarily at young people, and it challenged the culture of knife carrying. To get the message across, the campaign was used in the cinema, on the radio and in the outdoor media. I am sure that many of us remember the cartoon-type TV advert in which a group of young people are out at night, get into a confrontation with other youths and one of them ends up getting killed. An

educational package to tackle knife crime was also introduced in our schools, and it highlighted the dangers of carrying knives.

Although conviction rates for the offence of carrying an offensive weapon on school premises are low — there were only three such convictions between 2004 and 2006 — the victims of knife crime are usually young people, and they are the group that is most likely to carry offensive weapons. During the same period, four people were convicted for possessing, on school premises, an article with a blade or point. Such activity may be due to fashion trends or to the image of feeling safe, and we must tackle that.

Legislation is similar across the UK, and Northern Ireland has largely matched what has been done in England. However, the Metropolitan Police in London have been active in tackling knife crime through carrying out test-purchasing operations to identify retailers who sell knives to those under the legal age and by undertaking high-profile deterrent campaigns involving metal detectors and X-ray machines at bus stations, rail stations and other public places. Head teachers have the power to search a pupil if there are reasonable grounds for suspecting that the pupil has a knife or offensive weapon.

The Government in Scotland doubled the penalty for possession of a bladed article in a public place or school premises by raising the maximum imprisonment from six months to 12 months and the penalty for indictment from two years to four years. Anyone who is caught with an offensive weapon in Scotland will be arrested and kept in custody pending a court appearance. Prosecutors will oppose bail if a person has had one or more previous convictions involving an offensive weapon.

The Internet has opened doors in allowing people to get their hands on offensive weapons. Offensive weapons can be purchased with ease in many countries around the world. People gain access to those weapons while on holiday or via the post, and the UK Border Agency is responsible for intercepting and seizing a wide range of restricted goods.

Given that knife crime and convictions for the possession of a knife or offensive weapon are rising, and given that we are seeing no reduction in that figure, we must move to increase sentencing as a deterrent and run an

ongoing campaign that is dedicated to tackling knife crime. Our approach should involve another knife amnesty that is similar to that of 2006, as well as a series of TV adverts and school programmes. We should also perhaps look to the measures that were introduced in the crackdown in London. That involves metal detectors and X-ray machines. It may seem serious and a little over the top, but we must do everything that is in our power to take these weapons off our streets.

Knives pose a greater threat to society than guns. It is illegal to possess a gun without a licence, and it is legal to use a gun only in specific circumstances, namely within the confines of a registered club. Knives can kill and seriously injure. I appreciate that they are easy to get hold of, given that they have domestic use, but we must stamp down on the possession of knives, take them off our streets and thereby reduce their usage. I want a ban on replica knives, an increase in sentencing, a new knife-amnesty period, better education and awareness in our schools —

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

Mr Easton: — and a better counselling service for victims of knife crime. I urge Members to support the motion, and I look forward to the debate.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I will speak in favour of the motion. Indeed, I have to say that I broadly agree with much of what the previous Member to speak outlined. We can all refer to particular examples of horrific knife attacks or stabbings in our own constituencies, and, unfortunately, as the statistics point out, such attacks are on the increase.

Any strategy that aims to take knives off the streets must look not only at strengthening legal deterrents but at the attitudes and subcultures that drive people, especially young people, to carry a knife in public.

Of course, as has already been said, knives are easily accessible. A person can get a kitchen knife from a drawer or go into a garage to get a Stanley knife from a toolbox. Such knives are easy to access and are deadly. Although less intimidating than combat knives and the like, they are equally lethal.

12.00 noon

The concealed knives that are being designed are another cause for concern, and we have seen pictures of them and heard stories about them through our work with the Policing Board. Some have been concealed in mobile phones, while others have been concealed in the top of boots. Such knives are designed to be lethal. It is equally important that we get those types of knives completely out of the community.

Some hold the view that carrying and using knives gives them some sort of status. The carrying of knives for protection is not something that we, as a society, can tolerate. The carrying of knives in schools has become a major problem in some countries. It is not a major problem here; nonetheless, it is important that we prevent such a culture from developing. I welcome the fact that the Minister of Justice is looking into that matter.

As Mr Easton said, the knives amnesty was a success. We certainly welcome that initiative, which took 1,500 knives off the streets of the North, and we would welcome a similar initiative. There are also other types of initiatives. For example, the gardaí, in conjunction with the Minister for Justice and Law Reform in Dublin, carried out a public information campaign, *How Big Do You Feel?* The campaign was targeted at children, and it involved workshops with schoolchildren, online initiatives through social media such as Twitter, Facebook, and so on, and community meetings. Those things should be looked at.

PSNI figures show that there has been an increase in the total number of knife-related incidents. In 2009-2010, there were 227 robberies involving a knife or a sharp instrument; seven homicides; 31 attempted murders; 104 threats to kill; 562 ABH and GBH incidents; and seven rapes and sexual assaults. There were 938 incidents in total, which is an increase of 30, as Mr Easton already said, and that was despite the introduction of tougher measures. That is an indication that we need a multifaceted approach. Not only do we need tougher legislation and sentences but we must recognise that education is vital: it is vital to ensuring that young people do not start to carry knives because of a misguided view that they need them for protection or because they want to impress their peers.

We have all heard horror stories from other countries of children being stabbed by youths over the most trivial of issues, particularly in

London and in England in general but also closer to home. We must ensure that such a culture does not develop here by building on the work that the Department of Education, the PSNI, the Youth Justice Agency and others have done to educate young people about the dangers of carrying knives.

I support the motion, and I thank the Members who tabled it. I look forward to hearing the Justice Minister outline not only what he will do in his Department but how he will work with other Departments to ensure that best practice in other jurisdictions is adopted here.

Mr K Robinson: I am pleased to support the motion. Those who have been Members for a long time may recall that I first raised the issue in 2002. Unfortunately, in those days, I was somewhat of a lone voice and, indeed, could have been forgiven for thinking that those in the agencies charged with protecting the public from knife crime were not unduly exercised by the signs that it was a growing problem in Northern Ireland.

There is no doubt that knife crime is a complex issue and that a comprehensive set of initiatives will be required to address it. Fortunately, we have some excellent examples on which to base our proposals. Our colleagues in the Scottish Parliament were equally concerned about the impact of knife crime on society there, especially about its prevalence in, and impact on, the western portion of the industrial belt in that jurisdiction. I suggest that many of the social traits that manifest themselves in industrial society in Scotland are also present in the make-up of sections of society here in Northern Ireland. The abuse of alcohol, fierce territorial loyalties, the hard man image, and an imagined and ingrained sense of community loyalties perceive the law with less than admiration, whether it is in the form of the policeman on the beat or the judiciary behind the bench. If we are to attempt to break the cycle of knife-related crimes, we must understand the factors that give it credibility in parts of our society.

We must introduce imaginative educational packages to our schools at an early stage. Drama has been a hard-hitting approach that has been used successfully in Scotland. It highlights for pupils in a practical way the dangers of carrying a weapon. Young people, as has already been said, will often respond to the question "why are you carrying a knife?" with the answer "to protect myself". Education must show them that carrying a knife actually increases their dangers.

It can lead, in an instant, to someone dying and to the other person spending a long term behind prison bars.

The Scots also addressed the issue of people who sell horrific ranges of knives, from flick knives and combat knives through to samurai swords and worse. The sellers had to be registered; they had to record the ages, names and addresses of people who purchased knives from them; and any flouting of that system had dire consequences for the retailers.

As I said in 2002, tackling knife crime is not just about harsher sentencing. It is also about educating young people away from the gang culture that often accompanies such activity. The citizens of London have already been mentioned. They, in particular, have witnessed barbaric behaviour from groups of young people who divide their streets up into territories and then fight over them or travel some distances to inflict injury on rival gang members. We have witnessed on our television screens an endless stream of senseless slayings as a result of that activity.

How do we address the problem and curb its growth in Northern Ireland? Sadly, we are starting from a catch-up position, since we too have witnessed many young people prepared to use weapons in a variety of ways. Therefore, we must vigorously pursue a programme that will educate our most vulnerable people in ways that will introduce them to the positive alternatives and prevent them from becoming fodder for those gangs. We must support the police in targeted stop-and-search initiatives, which will help to discourage the carrying of knives, or, when the knives are discovered, to remove them from the person. There must be no human rights smokescreen. Carrying a knife is a crime, and it must be treated as such.

Possession of a knife in a public place or in a school is a very serious matter. There cannot be any back doors on that issue. In 2006, the Northern Ireland Office, under pressure, I felt, eventually decided to bring in a half-hearted amnesty. It was not as successful as it could have and should have been. In my council area, the low number of weapons that were handed in was a disgrace. However, when bins are sited in out-of-the-way places and people are expected to travel many miles by public transport to deposit a knife or other offensive weapon, it is not going to work. Therefore, I call for another amnesty, and, this time, let us get the full backing of society behind it.

The Justice Minister and his various agencies do not need a further consultation process to realise that the public are crying out for firm action. He can clearly see from the consultation process that was carried out in Scotland in 2005 that we must increase and make meaningful the sentences that are handed down, so that we deter the hard core of knife carriers and indicate clearly to their hangers-on that society is determined that knife crime will not pay and that anyone who is involved in it and anyone who is a carrier will pay a high price.

For clarification, Mr Deputy Speaker, if you will bear with me, in Scotland —

Mr Deputy Speaker: I am sorry, but your time is up.

Mr K Robinson: In Scotland, there were some cultural difficulties where people carried knives or sgian dubhs for ceremonial purposes.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Your time is up. We must move on.

Mr K Robinson: I ask the Justice Minister in his wisdom to look kindly upon that situation.

Mr McDevitt: It is noticeable that, despite the 2008 legislation, knife crime in our region continues to rise. In 2008-09, we were told that there were 908 incidents across Northern Ireland involving the use of a sharp instrument. That figure went up to 938 in the following year. Members were shocked by the murder of Thomas Devlin. I am sure that all of us were taken aback by the extent to which his mother, Penny Holloway, and his dad, Jim, campaigned responsibly and honourably for knife crime to be taken more seriously, not only by legislators, but by police, educational providers and others. It is a pity that, even after legislation has been introduced, there have not been the improvements that we expected.

Shortly after Thomas's murder, 'The Irish News' revealed, in December 2006, that fewer than 15% of people who had been convicted of possessing an offensive weapon since 2000 received a jail sentence. The paper went on to say that of the more than 750 people who were convicted of possessing knives or bladed articles between 2000 and 2004, more than half escaped with a fine or a community supervision order.

During the first amnesty, to which Mr Robinson referred, only 900 knives were handed over. As colleagues noted, the South is slightly ahead

in that regard. In 2009, it introduced legislation to toughen considerably the sentences for possession of a knife or sharp instrument. It went further and also banned samurai and other ceremonial swords. Mr Robinson made an interesting point about the cultural traditions in Scotland, some of which are also observed in this region. However, we should not let those traditions get in the way of being able to tell the difference between what is a genuinely dangerous and potentially offensive weapon and what is not.

Against that, it is worth noting that, in Scotland, convictions for carrying knives are at their lowest level for a decade. What seems to work in Scotland is a combination of good legislation, strong sentences, proactive policing and good integration of the work being done in schools, by the education services and by the criminal justice system. In fact, in January 2010, we heard news from Glasgow that the number of people who were caught carrying knives had increased because of the number of spontaneous searches that were carried out by the police. When police in Strathclyde carried out a pilot in the Inverclyde area of Glasgow, preliminary figures showed a 50% increase in the number of people who were stopped, yet a 15% decrease in the number of knives that were seized. Therefore, there is a place for proactive, visible policing in areas where there is known to be a problem with knife-carrying and associated knife crime.

Scotland has also pioneered some good work in its school system. I am sure that colleagues will join me in thanking Research Services, as we always should, for the excellent briefing pack that they produced for the debate. That pack includes an Assembly question that Dr Farry asked the Minister of Education earlier in 2010. Notably, her answer was that the collaboration between her Department and the criminal justice system was not as in depth as many of us would wish. Therefore, I hope that the Minister of Justice, who has come to the House to respond to the debate, can point to improved working relationships and stronger collaboration in that area.

I want to mention briefly the sale of knives on the Internet and how to control the access to knives from outside the jurisdiction.

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

Mr McDevitt: I would like the Minister, in his response to the debate, to update the House on

conversations between him and the Republic's authorities, not only on the question of collaborating on control and sentencing, but on any collaboration or conversations on controlling access to illegal weapons.

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

Mr Lunn: I support the motion. Knife crime is a growing problem in society, particularly among young people. However, perhaps we should recognise that in respect of overall crime, it is not quite as big a problem in Northern Ireland as in the rest of the UK. The incidence of crimes that involve knives is lower — perhaps surprisingly so — than in England and Wales. I imagine that our record, when compared with those in some parts of the world, is also reasonably good. That is not to say that we should be complacent or do nothing. Reference has been made by Mr Easton and Mr McDevitt to the murder of Thomas Devlin. I make reference also to the murder in west Belfast a few years ago of Harry Holland. He was stabbed with a screwdriver, but, nonetheless, it was a pointed blade and equally dreadful. There have been other dreadful incidents, but they should not disguise the fact that, overall, our record is not as bad as that in London or in other places.

12.15 pm

People who carry an offensive weapon need to be in no doubt that they are in breach of the law. The Justice Bill, which was introduced yesterday by the Justice Minister, will reinforce the existing offences of having a blade, a pointed article or an offensive weapon in public, particularly around school premises, without good reason. It will also reinforce the other offences about selling a knife to someone under 18 or marketing a knife in a way that is likely to encourage violence. There may be an interpretation problem with some of that when it gets before the courts, but at least the law will be on the statute book. The maximum custodial penalty involved will go up to four years, which is a major improvement.

It is a problem, but most people who carry a knife do so without any offensive intent. For the record, and I do not like to sound as though I am declaring an interest, I carry a knife, and I always have done. Members will be relieved to know that I leave it in the car when I come to Stormont. Carrying a knife has been a habit since childhood, and I still have one. I do not intend to do any damage with it; it is a habit. We used to say that it was a good means of getting

a stone out of a horse's hoof, but those days are gone. It makes the framing of what constitutes an offence difficult. In my youth, everyone had a knife. I think that Mr Easton said that he had one as well. It is part of our culture.

Mr Easton: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I never said in my speech that I carried a knife. I want to make that clear for the Member who said that I did.

Mr McNarry: Do you carry one now?

Mr Easton: No.

Mr Lunn: I beg the Member's pardon; I picked him up wrongly. I thank him for the extra minute.

Unfortunately, times change. The proposed toughening of the law in the Justice Bill is necessary, but the sentencing of offenders is only one side of the equation. We need to encourage a change of attitude among our young men, and they need to be made to realise that it is socially unacceptable to carry a knife. It is not any kind of a status symbol; it is not cool, and it does not impress anybody.

Mr Weir: I thank the Member for giving way. He rightly identifies the need to change attitudes as much as anything else. I appreciate that he said earlier that his habit of carrying a knife is not meant to be offensive, and I am sure that we would all feel reasonably safe from the Member in that regard. As we talk about changing attitudes, will the Member take this opportunity to set an example and to indicate that, from now on, he will not carry a knife?

Mr Lunn: I certainly will not carry one if I am in breach of the law, but we will wait and see what the law says. It is not a big knife; it normally stays in the car. I am like a lot of people who carry small knives, and in my case it is a Swiss army knife.

We hear about stabbings occurring outside nightclubs; they are the result of drunken brawls. If the knives were not present, damage would still be done, but not serious damage. What used to be a fist fight has become a more serious event with tragic and fatal consequences in some situations. We can reinforce the law, but the education factor is important. We need to make it clear to young people in particular, by persuasion, amnesty or legislative means, that it is not acceptable to carry a blade, particularly an open blade that cannot be folded. We heard Mr Easton give quite a lengthy definition of what constitutes an

offensive blade. I wonder whether there is room in that for the addition of a simple definition about the length of a blade that cannot be folded. Beyond that, I intend to support the motion, and I will probably get rid of my knife before very long.

Mr Frew: I support the motion. I commend my colleagues for bringing it to the House and hope that it receives the support that it deserves. People who carry knives put themselves and others around them at risk of serious injury or even death. People who are caught in possession of a knife in a public place with no reasonable excuse or those who use a knife to commit an offence should expect to be prosecuted and put behind bars.

It is important that the PSNI and the Public Prosecution Service work hand in hand to try to make people aware that that behaviour will not be tolerated. However, it is not just the agencies at the front line of enforcement that need to come on board; it is the Prison Service, the Probation Board, the Youth Justice Agency, Crimestoppers, the educational establishments and society as a whole.

Powers relating to offences involving knives and other offensive weapons have increased, with maximum sentences increased to four years' imprisonment and/or an unlimited fine for having a knife in a public place or on school premises; possessing an offensive weapon; and offences relating to the sale or unlawful marketing of knives, including sales of knives to persons under 18 years of age. That is a doubling of the sentence, from two to four years, which came into effect in 2008.

I supported the first knife amnesty at that time, which resulted in 900 potentially lethal weapons being taken off the streets, and the second knife amnesty, which took around 600 potentially lethal weapons off the streets. Not only did those amnesties take potentially lethal weapons off the streets, they raised awareness of the dangers of illegally carrying knives in public and urged those who do so to stop. It is not so cool nowadays to carry a blade and it is not done for a person's protection; in fact, it could lead to their death. However, many of our young people still think it is acceptable to carry a knife. It is a status symbol that they think makes them look hard or mean.

I commend the Knives Ruin Lives campaign, which is aimed at 12- to 15-year-olds. That was developed by the NIO and is supported

by the PSNI, the Youth Justice Agency and Crimestoppers. Also, the 'Choices' drama is said to be an extremely powerful play, which should be used.

However, we still have a major problem in society, and it seems to be particularly bad in north and west Belfast. In east and south Belfast, the problem is getting worse year on year.

Mr P Maskey: The Member stated that the problem seems to be particularly bad in north and west Belfast. I am wondering where he got those statistics from. If he could share those with the House, I would appreciate it, because I have not seen them myself. I believe that crime, especially knife crime, can be bad all over the place.

Mr Frew: I will be able to get that information for the Member very quickly; I have it to hand.

The problem is not only in Belfast. I do not believe that our cities are any worse than any other cities in the UK; I believe that we are actually better than some cities, particularly Glasgow, London and Manchester. Nevertheless, the statistics are far too high in E district, D district and G district, and there seems to be a link with our other cities. That might be attributed to the build up of population in those districts, but bear in mind that people who live in the countryside and work on farms carry knives all the time, yet they do not seem to have the same problem.

Knife crime is a mindset problem and a society ill that we need to sort out. We should increase the maximum penalty for the offence of having a knife in what can be deemed an inappropriate area or dangerous situation. One does not need a knife in a bus station surrounded by children waiting to get a bus, or at 1.30 am when waiting for a taxi and eating a burger. We should continue to run further amnesties, as over 1,500 knives were voluntarily surrendered on the previous two occasions. Such amnesties raise awareness, and if bins for depositing knives were positioned better, if there were a better PR response, and if the media helped out, an amnesty could be very effective. The Departments of Justice, Education, Employment and Learning, and Health should co-operate more effectively to deal with this scourge.

Of course, it is not just knife crime; there are offences relating to crossbows and samurai swords, baseball bats and hurlies: a plastic spoon in the wrong hands at the wrong time can do terrible harm, as can pencils, lollipop sticks and broken glass.

It is a society ill; it is a mindset that needs to be rectified. We need to protect our young people and to remove and punish those who persist in such behaviour. We need tougher policing, longer sentencing and a collective will by the House and by the Executive to clamp down hard on knife crime.

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

Mr Frew: Thank you.

Mrs McGill: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I support the motion and commend those who tabled it. I also commend Mr Robinson, who has raised the issue before.

Knife crime here is not as prevalent as, perhaps, in the South of Ireland, and that is to be welcomed; it is important to keep that in mind when discussing the issue, particularly with regard to gang culture. However, reference was made to one high-profile atrocity that happened to Thomas Devlin and to his family's campaign for tougher sentencing.

Although tougher sentencing should form part of our discussion, the mindset of people who carry a knife is important: they take a knife with them as they go down a street, and soon a young person is dead, having been stabbed not once but nine times. Something is wrong. What is the mindset of someone who does that? Why does someone furnish himself with a knife to go out to devastate a family not just for the immediate future but forever?

Although it is to be welcomed that, according to statistics and the opinion of those who know, knife crime here is not at the same level as elsewhere, the 'Irish News' printed an article in July of this year:

"Knife crime in Northern Ireland is on the increase."

It is on the increase since tougher sentencing was introduced, so I come back to my point about mindset, which colleagues opposite mentioned. What do we do? Is it about education? We have to strike a balance, and there are campaigns and strategies. Knife crime is an issue for the Department of Education, and I welcome the fact that Departments are working together on the matter.

12.30 pm

What should we do after this debate? Should we look to Scotland and to what is happening

there? Reference has been made to how the issue is being handled in Scotland. One of the strategies there has been to increase stops and searches. Even though there have been more stops and searches, the number of people who are carrying knives has reduced.

Mr Spratt: I am delighted to hear the Member, who is on the opposite Benches, advocate an increase in stop-and-search powers, despite the fact that some of her colleagues tried to resist the idea in past days.

There has been much talk about education and campaigns. What about encouraging all our communities, as I do from this side of the House, to give information to the Police Service and to allow it to deal with people who carry knives? That would be a very good start for us to make in the House.

Mrs McGill: I thank the Member for his intervention. However, I asked whether we should look to Scotland, where that is happening. I did not get to finish my point, because I gave way to the Member.

Should we look to Scotland? There has been an increase in the use of stop-and-search powers in Scotland, but I think that that has been targeted at a particular area where knife crime and gang culture form much of what happens. As I said at the beginning of my contribution, I am not sure that that is the case here, and I welcome that.

One other point that I want to make, which again concerns Scotland, goes back to the importance of mindset. A point was made in the press that in Scotland, younger people who carry weapons are beginning to see doing so as the act of a loser. We all owe it to young people to not repeatedly talk about weapons as status symbols but to talk instead about carrying them as the act of a loser.

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

Mrs McGill: I support the motion. Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has arranged to meet immediately upon the lunchtime suspension. I propose, therefore, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until 2.00 pm, when the next Member to speak will be George Robinson.

The sitting was suspended at 12.32 pm.

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

2.00 pm

Mr G Robinson: Knife crime has become increasingly common in Northern Ireland, and, sadly, its results have become increasingly lethal. It tends to occur among younger people, and, therefore, it is all the more worrying. I say that because there is a greater tendency in some cases for young people to become involved in fights when intoxicated or, in other cases, while carrying a knife as an act of bravery. Other incidents of knife crime occur during domestic disputes, when home knives are used to inflict injury or even death. I do not want young people to be given criminal records, nor do I want to see anyone in an early grave because someone thinks that carrying a knife makes him a big man. I have this message for such people: you are not a big man; you are making yourself a target. To stop the carrying of knives and to make it unacceptable as a show of bravery, the sentences available to the judiciary must be of a level sufficient to act as a deterrent. That may sound draconian, but imposing tougher sentences will be worth it if it helps to save even one life.

Much information has been supplied as to what has happened elsewhere, but I am only interested in what happens in Northern Ireland. By all means, let us look at what works elsewhere, but let us ensure that Northern Ireland makes up its own mind as to how it deals with knife crime. I am confident that our Justice Minister will ensure that knife criminals will face the full rigours of the law. Sentences need to be increased in the case of hardened offenders. If someone convicted of carrying a knife reoffends, he should be dealt with more severely. If that stops one young person carrying a knife, it will be worth it.

We must also look at why people carry knives in the first place. Some say that they feel that they must protect themselves; others do so because they seek an opportunity to use a knife. I hope that the legislation will take account of those reasons and give a wide choice of sentences to the judiciary. Taking personal circumstances into account is fair and sensible.

I also take this opportunity to ask the Minister to work with Executive colleagues who can aid in reducing the carrying of knives, for example, the Minister of Education. Education as to the

consequences of carrying knives may prevent an offence and the heartbreak felt in the homes of the victims of knife crime, among the families of the bereaved and the offender. There are always two homes destroyed in those tragic circumstances. I support the motion.

Mr McNarry: I will not comment on the confessions that I heard other Members make this morning. I have nothing to say on that. It is a good job that we are not discussing gun crime, because that might be very interesting.

The latest figures from the PSNI show that knife crime is endemic in some parts of the Province but not in others. The PSNI's A district, which covers north and west Belfast, had 178 knife-related offences recorded last year. That is more than double the number in my area, C district, which covers Ards, Castlereagh, Down and north Down. However, those of us in those areas cannot be complacent.

I remind Members of a shocking incident that occurred on Christmas Eve 2005, when a young man and his friend were attacked by a group in Meetinghouse Lane in Newtownards. His friend escaped harm, but the young man, Grant Dugan, then aged 19, was stabbed seven times, not with a knife, but with a broken bottle. His father said that it was a miracle that Grant survived and:

"He has done absolutely amazing and I mean amazing",

Grant did regain consciousness, with his parents maintaining a Christmas vigil at his bedside in the Royal Victoria Hospital in Belfast. At that time, Grant faced an uncertain future, as it was not known for some time whether he would make a full recovery.

His mother, Maud, said at the time that the attack was "thuggery" and that her son faced more operations over the following fortnight but that they were confident that her son would pull through. She said:

"We nearly lost our son who had never, ever hurt anyone,"

Thankfully, Grant recovered from that horrific attack. As I said, it was not a knife attack, but it illustrates that a stabbing by a broken bottle is still a stabbing and is a most serious crime.

The 'Belfast Telegraph' stated:

"After watching his attackers being led from Belfast Crown Court, Mr Dugan said: 'I'm just happy the

three of them have been sent away. I can't remember anything about what happened. All I remember is waking up in hospital on New Year's Eve. What happened has destroyed my family life for the past year and a half because nothing has been the same since it happened, but I'm happy with the sentences the judge gave them.' Branding the attack on Mr Dugan as 'sustained, brutal and vicious', Mr Justice Coghlin said each accused came from 'positive and supportive family backgrounds'. Saying the aggression displayed was 'fuelled by excessive alcohol consumption', the judge said each 'should emphatically have known better.'"

The problem is that they did not.

I look forward to studying the details of the Minister of Justice's proposals to tackle knife crime in the upcoming Justice Bill. The issue of selling weapons must be monitored constantly. Unfortunately, a further unwelcome trend is that more and more young people bring knives into schools. Schools are places in which young people have the right to feel and be safe. Therefore, I welcome the Justice Minister's commitment to increasing the maximum penalty for bringing knives on to school premises. If a school decides that the problem is widespread, it should be entitled to search school bags. In more pressing cases, a school should be equipped with portable hand-held scanners. The possibility of being detected carrying a weapon and removed from school would deter most young people from taking the risk in the first place.

As mentioned during the debate, we must focus not only on the schoolchildren who carry weapons but on the young and not-so-young adults who carry them daily. No one in the House believes that the PSNI launching a major clampdown on those individuals or the Department of Justice suddenly ramping up the maximum sentence would result in a quick solution to the problem. Tempting as it is to put away offenders and to lose the key, solving knife crime is not only about tougher sentences and bigger fines. Rather, we must address not only knife crime in Northern Ireland but the culture of knife crime. Through using community groups and government agencies, we should try to get through to people who regard knives and other sharp objects as some sort of status symbols. The message of what can happen when a person carries a knife must be put across to those people and their parents. The belief that carrying a knife gives a level of protection should also be tackled — it is false. The fact that someone is much more

likely to be assaulted with his or her weapon must penetrate the minds of certain people.

I support the motion and wish it well. I look forward to hearing the Minister's contribution later today.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I am grateful for the opportunity to speak about such an important and serious issue. I thank the Members who brought the matter before us today, and I support the motion.

We all know that knife crime brings death and serious injury to many people every year. The families who have been bereaved through knife crime must live with the aftermath of those horrendous crimes every remaining day of their lives. Through campaigns and lobbying decision-makers such as us, some families are moved to help to ensure that young people have a greater awareness of the terrible effects of knife crime and to try to deter them from getting involved. Their suffering has been turned into a positive influence and has, without doubt, saved numerous lives. I think particularly of Penny Holloway and Jim Devlin, the parents of Thomas Devlin, who have done tremendous work in that respect. They deserve our gratitude for their brave efforts in the face of their great grief.

Before we move on to sentencing, it is important to emphasise the need to take all possible preventative measures to deter the carrying and use of knives for violent purposes. Prevention is better for the individual, the police, the criminal justice system and society in general. I mentioned the efforts of some of the bereaved families in that respect.

As Members will know, Northern Ireland had a knife amnesty between 24 May and 14 June 2006, which very successfully removed nearly 900 extremely dangerous knives from circulation. It also raised awareness of the danger of knives to the individual and to the public in general. During that three-week amnesty, knife crime fell by 30%. The removal of those lethal weapons prevented death, injury and destruction. We might reuse the amnesty approach at reasonable intervals.

I have spoken to young people who saw the drama mentioned earlier — 'Choices', which was written by John Kelly and produced by the C21 theatre company from Belfast as part of the Knives Ruin Lives campaign.

That presentation was aimed at post-primary students, namely those in fourth, fifth and sixth form, as well as young adults. Performed in schools and youth centres, the drama brought the message of the danger of knives directly to young people. It was extremely effective. The feedback from it was very positive. Effective preventative approaches such as 'Choices' should not be one-offs but should be offered to every generation of teenagers to ensure that the message is constantly communicated.

New technologies and social media networks, such as Facebook and YouTube, can and are being used to prevent knife crime. In London, there is a text number that young people can use to send the name and location of a knife carrier, whether they are on school premises or outside. The website www.knifecrimes.org was established by Ann Oakes-Odger following the murder of her son Westley on 12th September 2005. The website is tremendous, has many worthwhile resources and is worth visiting.

Prevention through education should be exploited to the full because, at the end of the day, prevention is the best approach for all concerned. The Department of Education and the Department for Employment and Learning, in particular, have a role to play, along with the police and Youth Justice.

Those who do not heed preventative messages and who engage in knife crime, whether by carrying a knife in public or using one to kill or injure another person, must be deterred by the strongest possible sentences. Knives are lethal weapons. They can be as lethal as guns, and their use must meet the same strength of sentencing. I support the motion.

The Minister of Justice (Mr Ford): I welcome the opportunity to join in the debate, and I congratulate Mr Easton and his colleagues for securing it. At the outset, as Minister, I repeat the point that has been made by so many others: knife crime is utterly unacceptable. That is, clearly, the unified view across the Chamber, and, as Minister, I am committed to addressing knife and other types of crime.

When we hear about some recent, appalling knife-crime attacks, which, in some instances, resulted in fatalities, it is understandable that concerns about knife crime are heightened. They are concerns that we all share. We have also seen a marginal increase in the number of knife crimes in recent years. However, we should

be mindful that, based on the recorded crime rate per 100,000 of the population, the level of crime, generally, in Northern Ireland is 23% lower than in England and Wales. Compared to other parts of these islands, Northern Ireland does not have a knife culture. In 2009-2010, the recorded knife crime rate per 100,000 was 52, whereas in England and Wales it was 62. Although there were minor trends upwards and downwards, we need to be careful not to conclude that there is a serious upsurge in knife crime in this region. However, there is certainly no room for complacency. Members who have referred to individual cases have made that point absolutely clearly.

In response to Mr McNarry in particular, part of the reason why my Department spent £2 million on 19 town centre CCTV schemes, with 87 cameras, was to deter the kind of attacks that he highlighted. Indeed, Mr Dugan and his family helped my predecessor to launch that scheme. I hope that that is some reassurance of the serious way in which the Department of Justice takes, and its predecessor Department took, the issue. We take offences involving knives very seriously, so a range of measures have been and continue to be taken by my Department, in partnership with others, to address knife crime.

2.15 pm

The first part of the motion calls on me:

"to introduce tougher sentences for persons convicted of knife crime".

Of course, in each case, using their professional judgement and expertise, it is for the judiciary to decide on the appropriate sentence. However, it is for us, as Members, to put into law the parameters within which sentences are handed down. The maximum penalties available to the courts for knife-related offences in Northern Ireland are already very high. As Members will know, life imprisonment is available for murder, and up to five years is available for causing grievous bodily harm, whatever the weapon.

I shall now refer to offences that involve knives explicitly, such as possessing a knife in public without good reason. As to the availability of knives, we all know that they have many legitimate uses in everyday life. However, it is right to take precautions against knives and other potential weapons being too easily available. In 2006, the age at which a person may be sold a knife was raised from 16 to

18. As recently as 2008, the law in Northern Ireland was amended to include a range of offences around the possession of knives and other offensive weapons. The maximum penalties available for those offences have been standardised to include up to 12 months' imprisonment when a case is heard in a Magistrate's Court and up to four years when it is heard in the Crown Court.

Of course, much of the issue around the possession of knives, except, for example, in cases involving flick knives, centres on circumstances rather than on the size of the knife, which is a point that several Members made. The offence of selling a knife to a young person saw the minimum age increase from 16 to 18, with a penalty of up to four years in prison. Likewise, the penalty is up to four years' imprisonment for offences involving the publicising or marketing of combat knives.

The Justice Bill, which was introduced yesterday, completes the knife-crime sentencing package by applying the same maximum sentences to two remaining offences; namely, the possession of a knife on school premises, and being armed with an offensive weapon with intent to commit an indictable offence. The police, in particular, registered the importance of the armed-with-intent offence. Previously, the penalty was only up to three months' imprisonment, as it is a charge that the police are likely to pursue, particularly when, for example, they apprehend someone on private property with a weapon who may be about to burgle a home or a shop. I believe that the maximum penalties will be seen to be tough but fair.

The message to people who carry knives in public without a reasonable excuse is that they face a substantial period in prison. As has been said, carrying knives in the street is not cool or acceptable, and those who attempt to carry knives for what they see as self-defence should be fully aware that it does not, in fact, protect anyone, least of all the carrier, who may end up being the victim.

On that point, when Mr Easton proposed the motion, he suggested that, for a number of offences, the 12-month sentence should be increased to 24 months. In most cases, the jurisdiction of a Magistrate's Court extends, across a range of offences, only up to 12-month sentences. However, if a case is regarded as being more serious, it is possible to transfer it

to the Crown Court, where the maximum penalty is four years. Indeed, for similar offences, the maximum sentence in Northern Ireland is generally twice as long as it is for the equivalent offence in England and Wales. Indeed, for the crime of trespassing with a knife, the maximum sentence here is four years, whereas it is six months in England and Wales. Therefore, given that matters are considered rather more seriously here than they are in the nearest equivalent jurisdiction, I hope that Members are reassured that account has been taken of the concerns expressed.

Knife crime is not a prominent issue in Northern Ireland. However, that certainly does not diminish the impact of any single violent incident perpetrated by the unlawful use of knives, which is totally unacceptable. We heard about a number of families who have suffered in that respect. As Minister, I fully respect the role and responsibility of the Policing Board to set priorities that are appropriate. In that context, I note that reducing violent crime has been identified by the board and the Chief Constable as a priority issue and by the Department as a target in the addendum to the Programme for Government, which the Assembly approved last week. The priority given to violent crime reflects the Chief Constable's strategic objective of addressing issues of serious harm. The Chief Constable has implemented a number of measures to combat violent crime, and he has assigned violent crime lead officers to each district to report on the progress of those initiatives.

As reported earlier, there has been a welcome reduction in overall levels of violent crime. Progress is being made, and the rate of recorded offences is going down. Notably, for example, the homicide figure for 2009-2010 is the lowest since 1970, and there were 15% fewer attempted murders in 2009-2010 than in 2007-08. Therefore, the trends are not all as negative as the individual cases, however nasty, would suggest.

I am concerned that a number of recent knife attacks appear to have occurred in domestic situations, and the indications are that alcohol is frequently a factor. In some cases, hate crime can be a factor. Although it has been possible, through legislation, to place controls on the purchase of knives and on their possession in public places, it must be recognised that knives are in everyday use and are readily available in every household. Legislation on their sale

has had little impact on their use in domestic violence, as we have seen so tragically in recent months. Rather, there is an imperative on us all to seek to better protect victims of domestic violence and to bring perpetrators to account.

Much work has already been done under 'Tackling Violence at Home: A Strategy for Addressing Domestic Violence and Abuse in Northern Ireland'. The strategy is very clear that domestic violence is a crime and is not acceptable in any circumstances. It further sets out the Executive's commitment to work in partnership with others in the statutory, voluntary and community sectors to tackle that heinous crime. My Department has joint policy lead with DHSSPS on domestic violence. It is a cross-departmental issue, however, and I work alongside ministerial colleagues on the inter-ministerial group on domestic and sexual violence.

At this point, I do not propose to detail all the initiatives that are being taken forward under the strategy, but key actions include raising awareness of domestic violence, and encouraging victims to break the silence and to come forward to seek help by, for example, using the hotline. It is also imperative to protect those who are most at risk. This year, multi-agency risk assessment conferences, also known as MARACs, were introduced across Northern Ireland. They use a multi-agency approach to help to protect high-risk victims of domestic violence in Northern Ireland. The Tackling Violence at Home strategy is also very clear in its message to perpetrators that they will be held accountable for their behaviour.

I believe that public confidence in the courts is fundamental to an effective criminal justice system. That was recognised in the Agreement at Hillsborough Castle, which proposed that the establishment of a sentencing guidelines council be considered for inclusion in the addendum to the Programme for Government on the Department of Justice. The public consultation paper, which I launched on 12 October, honours that commitment. The consultation examines a range of issues impacting on public confidence in sentencing, and it seeks views on the role that a sentencing guidelines mechanism may have in addressing them. That is a key issue, and Members may choose to address whether public confidence needs to be enhanced by such a measure. It is out for consultation, and I trust that Members will respond to it.

In seeking to reduce offending behaviour, and, again, drawing on the Hillsborough Castle Agreement, I am developing a twin-track approach to orchestrate the efficient and effective management of offenders in the criminal justice system and to identify ways of working across government to interrupt the flow of new recruits to offending. My aim is to promote a joined-up approach in the criminal justice system through the development of a strategic framework to link together and streamline existing strategies and initiatives. I will build new partnerships across Departments to tackle, through targeted early intervention, some of the root causes of future offending.

We need to remember that, for every perpetrator of crime, there is a victim or victims. I wish to ensure that victims of crime, including those who have been victims of knife crime, receive the highest standards of service possible from the justice system. That means giving victims the service that they deserve, the information that they need and the support that helps them with the consequences of their experience. In May, I launched two guides to the criminal justice system: one is for victims and witnesses of crime; and the other is a specific guide for families and friends bereaved through murder and manslaughter.

In July, I announced a dedicated programme of work specifically designed to improve the victims' experience of the justice system. That work includes the development of a new code of practice that will set out the minimum standards of service that the criminal justice agencies will be expected to provide to victims of crime. I will shortly be announcing the consultation on the draft code. Members will know that the Justice Bill, which was introduced yesterday, will include a number of provisions for victims.

I also mentioned that alcohol appears to have been a feature of a number of recent incidents. Studies have suggested that alcohol and drug misuse can contribute to offenders committing violent crime. In recognition of the part that alcohol plays in crime, a number of initiatives have been taken forward under the new strategic direction for alcohol and drugs, which aims to reduce the level of alcohol and drug-related harm in Northern Ireland.

Although we have a duty to ensure that we have in place the legislation to address knife crime, we also have a duty to inform and educate

people about the dangers of carrying knives and the consequences of such behaviour. Indeed, a number of Members made that point.

In recent years, awareness-raising has included the knife crime amnesty of 2006, which resulted in the removal of approximately 1,500 potentially lethal weapons from our streets, a major public information campaign and work in schools by the PSNI and the criminal justice outreach programme. Therefore, I assure Mr Easton in particular that that did not happen only when he was at school; police officers continue that work. At this stage, I have no plans to reinstate the knife amnesty, which was part of a wider UK campaign at the time. However, that can remain under consideration as we look at our needs for the future.

The key issue that we will deal with in the future is the new community safety strategy, which I will publish for consultation shortly. It contains proposals on how to tackle hate crime and other kinds of crime, including domestic violence. As Minister of Justice, I want devolution to make a difference, and a key aspect of that is the development of the community safety strategy to reflect fully Northern Ireland's community safety needs, with a strong emphasis on the work to build a shared future. I have stated that one of my key goals is to lead a debate on what a new community safety strategy should include and to publish an agreed strategy next spring.

I will issue a public consultation paper shortly so that the consultation exercise can take place over the coming months. I am committed to consulting as widely as possible with individuals across Northern Ireland to get their views on how to create a safer shared community. The cross-departmental advisory group includes, as some Members highlighted, the Department of Education. That consultation process will provide an opportunity for Members to comment on knife crime and other issues. We share responsibilities with other jurisdictions, and I assure Members that those issues were raised when I met Kenny MacAskill and Dermot Ahern recently. If lessons can be learned from any neighbouring jurisdictions, we are open to learning them.

In conclusion, assurances can be drawn from the fact that Northern Ireland does not have the knife crime culture that is evident in other parts of the UK. Much has already been done to tackle knife crime in Northern Ireland,

including legislation to increase penalties and practical steps to raise awareness and remove such weapons from our streets. As Members highlighted, prevention, deterrents and education are important parts of a strategy to tackle knife crime. However, more remains to be done, and the community safety strategy provides the opportunity to gather a range of views to inform the strategy to address all forms of crime and antisocial behaviour. I am sure that Members will wish to participate in that consultation by citing some of the examples that we have heard in today's debate.

Mr Deputy Speaker: As Question Time commences at 2.30 pm, I suggest that the House take its ease until that time. The debate will continue after Question Time, when Mr Peter Weir will make a winding-up speech.

The debate stood suspended.

2.30 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Social Development

Benefits

1. **Mr F McCann** asked the Minister for Social Development whether he will consider bringing together housing rights experts, the Law Centre and disability and mental health groups to discuss the implications of proposed benefit cuts and how a more sympathetic approach can be developed to protect people in need. (AQO 339/11)

The Minister for Social Development

(Mr Attwood): I thank the Member for the question. He raises an important principle. It would be thoughtless folly if I as a Minister or government alone thought that that they could move forward on the issue of welfare reform and benefit changes without the involvement of the wider community. That is why I agree with the principle, so much so that I have already acted on it in advance of any question being raised. I have done two things. First, I have asked senior officials to meet external experts — namely, Les Allamby from the Law Centre, Eileen Evason, who is well established in the welfare world in Northern Ireland, and Philip McDonagh, an economist — to scope out how we might respond to the emerging situation.

Secondly, on 4 October, the Social Security Agency had an initial session with people from the voluntary and community sector to look at proposals, in a dedicated way, on incapacity benefit reassessment and to discuss the agency's approach to reassessment. In addition, I have tasked my permanent secretary, who commenced the work some time ago, to consider how the Department for Social Development (DSD) can best respond to potential cuts and protect vulnerable and disadvantaged people. In fact, I understand that there will be a meeting of that project team tomorrow. I agree with the principle, and the Member will agree that I have been ahead of the issue in my taking forward of those initiatives.

Mr F McCann: I thank the Minister for his response. Over a period of time, whether on the

Floor of the House or in Committee, there has been a general agreement that there are people outside government structures who could play a good role in advising on the best way forward on the issue. The Committee for Social Development has found other groups that are fairly good. The Housing Rights Service, for example, represents people who are in difficulties with mortgages. Disability Action has experts in its field and can provide additional thinking outside the box while people in the Department might be straitjacketed. I would appreciate it if the Minister were to take that on board.

The Minister for Social Development: I agree with the Member. There is not a group that he mentioned that I have not met or with which my officials or I are not in regular ongoing contact. If we are to go beyond parity without any financial pain, maximise operational flexibilities that are consistent with parity and do things differently from London by slowing down or opting out of some of their proposed changes, we will all need to work together in the Chamber and with those outside the Chamber who are best qualified to maximise the opportunities.

Mr McNarry: I listened with interest to the Minister's responses. Does he have figures on the numbers of people who do not take up benefits, the categories that are involved and the amount of money? Does his budget juggling underwrite the amount as a bonus saving for his Department?

The Minister for Social Development: There are figures and suggestions about people who are not in receipt of benefit and who might be entitled to it. What we do in response to that is more important. Northern Ireland has elaborate mechanisms to attempt to enable people to take up benefit, and that will come up in a later question. In part, that explains the higher benefit take-up in Northern Ireland compared with parts of Britain. I will give one small example. Last week, I was in the jobs and benefits office in Portadown. Twenty people spread across Northern Ireland give dedicated advice to senior citizens. At that office, one of their case workers told me about an 83-year-old woman who recently came into the office. She had lost her payment book, and as a result of that conversation, between attendance allowance and carer's allowance, her benefit take-up was doubled.

That demonstrates that, through the work of the jobs and benefits offices, the benefit take-up campaigns and the various other initiatives in the statutory sector and, as Mr McCann confirmed, in the non-statutory sector, significant efforts are being made to ensure that there is benefit uptake. However, we can do more, and those in London can learn more from what we do. Nevertheless, I think that we are going in the right direction.

Mrs M Bradley: Will the Minister tell us how ministerial priorities for housing will change in light of the very difficult financial environment?

The Minister for Social Development: I hope that the priorities will remain broadly as they were and that the Executive will agree to fund at least 2,000 newbuild starts each year. I am able to do that this year, thereby building on Margaret Ritchie's success in securing over 1,800 newbuilds last year.

I also hope that we will be in a position to continue to fund all the other good work that the Housing Executive does through the warm homes scheme, Egan contracts, maintenance contracts and the range of other services that it provides. As I have said before, the key, essential issue is whether the Executive will put the protection of those in need, stress and disadvantage at the core and heart of their Budget decisions. If that ethic prevails, so will the Department for Social Development's interests and those of the other Departments that offer front line services, including the Health Department and the Department of Education.

Child Benefit

2. **Mr Bresland** asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of the proposed change to child benefit. (AQO 340/11)

The Minister for Social Development: I thank the Member for his question. I hope that everybody in the Chamber is concerned about what was proposed at the Tory Party conference a number of weeks ago. It appears that the proposal on child benefit was made over the heads of some of the party's Ministers as well as its Liberal Democrat colleagues.

I do not believe that the proposal is a done deal. On the Monday morning when the Chancellor announced what he intended to do, I and many others expressed our concern, if not opposition. However, by Monday evening, when

I and others were at the Tory Party conference in Birmingham, the proposal was beginning to unravel. I believe that the child benefit proposal and other proposals are not over the line and that a lobby in the House of the Commons can still come to fruition and block the proposal if those concerned about it exert the maximum pressure.

A proposal that with one hand removes child benefit from a parent or parents who are earning £45,000 but with the other hand gives child benefit to two parents who are earning less than £45,000 each but as much as £80,000 collectively is self-evidently ludicrous, inconsistent, inequitable, unfair and should not prevail. That is my view on the child benefit proposals.

If there is a need to target resources on those most in need, let us go in that direction. If there is a need to remove resources from those on the highest salaries, let us go in that direction. However, let us not have an inconsistent proposal.

Mr Bresland: I thank the Minister for his answer. He has partly answered my supplementary question, so I will put a different slant on it. Does he share my concern that the attack on child benefits might be the thin edge of the wedge and that other benefits, such as winter fuel payments to pensioners, may also come under attack?

The Minister for Social Development: Again, I welcome the Member's comments. I do not want to confirm his worst fears, but there has been speculation, even in the course of today, that the next proposal from the Tory-led Government will be to withdraw child benefit for children between the ages of 16 and 18. That is beginning to circulate today. I see that Mr McQuillan is nodding in agreement. I believe that what we are seeing is benefit cuts being masqueraded as reform. Nobody should be opposed to reform per se, and I am certainly an advocate of bigger and deeper reform in the Northern Ireland context. However, I am sure that the Member agrees that so-called reform that is actually benefit cuts masquerading as something else should be opposed.

Mr McClarty: Does the Minister accept that, when it comes to benefit reform, the most vulnerable in society must be protected?

The Minister for Social Development: As I said in my answer to Mr McCann's question,

unless that ethic is part of our Budget, part of benefit changes and part of front line Budget negotiations with the London Government, we are deluding ourselves and the people of Northern Ireland. My belief is all the more acute because the Tory Government might agree with all the voices from Northern Ireland that we suffer from historical and current levels of deprivation that are similar to those in parts of Scotland and Wales, but that our situation is complicated and compounded by the legacy of conflict and the risk of alienation and instability. This morning, I took part in a joint phone call with Iain Duncan Smith, Lord Freud and Maria Miller, during which we discussed another welfare proposal that might be coming down the tracks. All three Ministers might agree that that is part of the experience and narrative of Northern Ireland. If so, the consequence of their analysis must be that they protect people in Northern Ireland and, in particular, the very people whom the Member mentioned.

Ms Lo: I was pleased by the Minister's response to the confusing and unfair child benefit proposals. The Westminster Government pledged to halve child poverty by 2010 and end it totally by 2020. Does the Minister agree that the child benefit proposals will not make that happen?

The Minister for Social Development: My sense is that those outcomes were not going to arise in any case, because the pledge, although the correct one — some would argue that the proposals should have gone further — was jeopardised by the economic downturn. The pledge to impact on and eradicate child poverty was placed in jeopardy because of the consequences of the downturn on the Budget, the loss of work and the loss of public sector services. The proposals to change child benefit will only compound the situation, as will other similar proposals. That is why, whatever the top line from London, the bottom line in Northern Ireland should be an adherence to values that protect the people whom the Member mentioned.

Benefits

3. **Mr Brady** asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of the concept of a universal benefit. (AQO 341/11)

The Minister for Social Development: I thank the Member for his question. I refer him to my previous answers to questions about universal benefits, such as child benefit and winter fuel

payments. I have made clear how I regard the outworking of the concept and practice of universal benefits. If the Member is also asking about universal credits, which are being trialled in Iain Duncan Smith's twenty-first century reform proposal, some of those might work. A tapering system, for example, whereby people would not be penalised when it comes to their benefits, might encourage those who are capable of work to return to the workplace.

However, whatever the situation after tomorrow and over the coming months, when it comes to welfare changes and rates of benefit, the form of the London Government to date does not fill one with confidence that, as the full welfare agenda is worked through, they will do what I, the Member, and everybody else agrees should be done to protect those who are out of work and in receipt of benefits. With the passage of time, we will see whether the proposals measure up in a different way. However, at the moment, I put down a strong marker that we should remain vigilant.

Mr Brady: I thank the Minister for his answer. I am delighted that, at last, it has dawned on him, as it had on many of us, that cuts masquerading as reform are ludicrous. Will the proposed breach of the universality of child benefit lead to breaches in parity and to a greater rationalisation of how benefits are paid in the North?

The Minister for Social Development: That did not dawn on me only recently. The true nature of some of the Tory-led Administration proposals might have dawned on other Members recently.

2.45 pm

The second speech that I made in the Chamber as Minister related to Labour Party welfare reform, over which I made my concerns crystal clear. I do not think that a day has passed since, and I have certainly not done a media interview since, when I have not put down clear markers about my anxiety over what may be happening. Ever since the emergency Budget in June, which impacted disproportionately on the poor and disadvantaged, it has clearly been happening.

Let us be very clear on the issue of universality and the rationalisation that might arise: I want to scope the issue of parity. My officials are currently conducting an equality impact assessment on to the principle of parity in Northern Ireland. I am not just looking at the

individual changes to child benefit or housing benefit, or any of the other proposals that are coming down the tracks, but am beginning to scope the much more fundamental issue of the principle of parity, and whether the principle of parity, as it currently operates, does or does not have equality implications. That is some blue sky thinking and the broader context in which we should consider those matters.

However, I sound a cautionary note. At present, the net benefit to Northern Ireland of the difference between all tax take going across to the Exchequer and the payments back to us across the Irish Sea, in benefits and in block grant, is billions and billions. It is not measured in tens of thousands, or even in tens of millions, but in tens of billions. Therefore, in order to protect those in need and in disadvantage during a recession, we need to be mindful as we move forward, which I am doing, I hope, positively and innovatively, that we do not throw out the baby with the bath water and lose billions in order to achieve a principle that could come back in the face of too many.

Mr Cree: Does the Minister believe that the Department for Work and Pensions has finalised its proposals, and does he intend to speak to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions again before the spending review?

The Minister for Social Development: I will not be speaking to Iain Duncan Smith between today and tomorrow or today and Thursday. However, I told my officials this morning that we need to meet him again, next week if possible. I flagged that with Maria Miller when I spoke to her this morning about some further ideas that the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has about child maintenance. I put down very strong markers in private with Maria Miller about the next phase of what I might consider making people pay for what should be essential public and state services. However, I assure the Member that, in my view, the conversation with the London Government about the outworking of all that will take off only after this week. Members of the Government have spent so much time talking to one other that it will be after this week before they begin talking to others. In that context, I welcome the support from across the Chamber that the particular circumstances of Northern Ireland must be recognised in the overall Budget and in the overall benefits regime.

Mr Givan: Is the Minister aware of the rumour that the winter fuel payment will be abolished tomorrow, or at least significantly reduced by the coalition Government, the sister parties of the Ulster Unionist Party and the Alliance Party in this Chamber? If that is the case, it will have a detrimental impact, particularly on the elderly when they come to face this cold winter.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question?

Mr Givan: Does the Minister agree that that would be a retrograde step?

The Minister for Social Development: I absolutely agree that the apparent proposal to reduce the cold weather payment from £25 to £8.50, its original figure, is a retrograde step. In the fullness of time, I might bring that matter, along with some others, to the attention of the Executive to determine our local response. As the Member said, I understand that there is speculation of reductions in the £250 winter fuel payment and in the higher figure for older people, and I concur with his remarks.

Carer's Allowance

4. **Mr Savage** asked the Minister for Social Development what steps he is taking to improve the uptake of carer's allowance by carers of pension age. (AQO 342/11)

The Minister for Social Development: The Member's question touches on the earlier question that his colleague Mr McNarry answered.

Mr Kennedy: Asked.

The Minister for Social Development: Asked and was not answered, I am sure Mr Kennedy would claim.

If there was anything that I happened to miss — I am sure that there was — I will come back to it.

Carer's allowance is one example where the Department and benefits offices can work in a real, local and individual way to benefit the people whom we represent. A number of steps have been taken to improve the uptake of carer's allowance. Since 2005, the uptake programme has targeted 319,000 people, and £25 million of additional benefit has been paid in arrears. A total of 40,000 pensioners have been targeted specifically for carer's allowance, and 2,500 people will be targeted for carer's allowance during this year's benefit take-up campaign. Therefore, we are trying to push the

limits across the range of initiatives, particularly following the 2008 review that was conducted jointly by DSD and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety. As I indicated when I spoke about the case in Portadown, benefits take-up through benefits offices can work effectively to help those, especially the very elderly, who are in need.

Mr Savage: I thank the Minister for his answer. As we enter a period of fiscal constraint and benefit reform, does the Minister accept that it is vital for all those who are entitled to benefits to receive them? What targets does the Minister intend to set for carers of pensionable age to take up carer's allowance?

The Minister for Social Development: Again, I agree with the sentiment of the question. I welcome the range of questions that I have received, both orally and in writing, on the welfare issue. It has taken some time for the full consequences of the London Administration's proposals to be worked through, and it is very important that there is a shared narrative.

We have a number of models that are ongoing in the area of benefit uptake by pensioners. Those include outreach services through the 20 advisers in benefits offices; local promotional activity; specific publications; the website; and general assistance through the network of local offices. By June 2010, over £25 million of additional annual benefits in arrears were generated for pensioners. I do not know the target figure for the total benefit take-up in this year's campaign, but we are targeting 2,500 pensioners in order to maximise their benefits. We will try to do that if it helps those individuals.

Mr Dallat: The Minister will be aware that a carer's review was carried out jointly by his Department and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety. Will he give the House some indication of what the findings of that review were? Will he also tell us whether any progress has been made by his Department and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety in addressing those findings?

The Minister for Social Development: I thank the Member for the interruption and the question. He is quite right. A joint review was carried out in 2008, and it made 15 recommendations. The recommendations stated that, given the current context, the principle of parity needed to be protected. That is particularly so because of the risks to the elderly if there was some sort of

unilateral or reckless breach of that. The review also recommended that we should work closely with DWP on those matters. That is what I have been doing as Minister, as my predecessor did, and those relationships will probably have to intensify in the near future.

The review's specific recommendation that the Social Security Agency should include an exercise on carer's allowance in the benefit take-up campaign was actioned last year, and, as I indicated, it is continuing this year. Its recommendation that we should work closely with carers' organisations in examining the future role and scope of carers' benefits touches on Mr McCann's earlier question. We are working inside and outside the Chamber to do whatever is necessary to protect carers, pensioners and all those who are entitled to benefits.

Mr Bell: Does the Minister agree that Citizens Advice does some valuable work in linking carer's allowance to those who desperately need it?

Secondly, given the pressure that citizens advice bureaux are under, particularly in Newtownards, will his Department step up to the plate to ensure that people who are entitled to claim carer's allowance get that information?

The Minister for Social Development: Obviously, I concur with the Member's first point. The broader point is that we must try to protect the community and voluntary sector, whatever the budgetary situation. I have said on the Floor previously that I wrote to all Ministers to ask that funding for the community and voluntary sector does not go to the wall, either by design or default. That is the risk, given that 40% of the funding comes from my Department, 20% comes from the Department of Health and the other 40% is spread across Departments. There is a danger that Ministers — more by default; I hope not by design — will target the community and voluntary sector. We need to legislate against that.

I am aware of the situation in Newtownards. We have been trying to support the community and voluntary sector in Newtownards, including through the provision of new accommodation. If there is anything further that I can say in respect of the Newtownards citizens advice bureau, I will contact the Member with that information.

Dungannon Public Realm Scheme

5. **Lord Morrow** asked the Minister for Social Development whether Phase 1 of the public

realm scheme for Dungannon town centre is going ahead and if his Department has ring-fenced funding for this scheme. (AQO 343/11)

The Minister for Social Development: I thank the Member for his question. I reassure him that the Dungannon scheme, like a lot of other public realm and town centre schemes, is very important. As a result of Newcastle's public realm scheme, for example, footfall in the main street in Newcastle has increased by 300%. The opportunities for trade and tourism in a public realm scheme are confirmed by the evidence from the Newcastle scheme. I am sure that those opportunities will be confirmed by evidence from other places in the fullness of time — including Armagh, Mr Kennedy.

I am committed to the Dungannon scheme. Indeed, I was so committed to the Dungannon scheme that, in my bid for extra money in the June monitoring round, I put in proposals for £2.1 million for the Dungannon scheme so that it could be on site this year. That is how much I believe in the Dungannon scheme and various other schemes around Northern Ireland. Unfortunately, the Executive decided not to allocate sufficient moneys for the Dungannon scheme and various other urban regeneration projects; I was the lone dissenting voice.

My commitment to the Dungannon scheme and other public realm schemes is clear and certain. There is proof that those schemes work. On a pound-for-pound basis, they are one of the better economic interventions that we have in Northern Ireland. It is unfortunate that, when the opportunity existed to get Dungannon over the line in June, the Executive chose to do otherwise.

Lord Morrow: I thank the Minister for his reply. I am pleased to learn that he still sees the merits of the Dungannon scheme. I am very disappointed to hear that he did not get a voice for the Dungannon scheme in the Executive. Perhaps others will stand up to answer that one when their day comes. I think that the Minister is already on record as saying that the Dungannon scheme is so far advanced that it has to proceed anyway. Does he still hold that opinion?

The Minister for Social Development: Unfortunately, it was not so far advanced that it had to proceed. If there had been a contractual commitment, as I had in respect of a number of other schemes around Northern Ireland, I would have had to fulfil my contractual and

legal obligations one way or the other. However, the Dungannon scheme was not quite at the point of contract. It failed to jump that hurdle, even though it remained a priority commitment that I wished to have honoured and to see in place during the course of this year. Other opportunities have been lost too, but I will try to do something about those in the next number of months. Those opportunities include Strabane footbridge, various public realm works in regional towns of Northern Ireland, urban development grants and the like.

The real issue is this: will we in the Executive have a serious conversation about what economic interventions work best, especially during a time of recession? Is it better or worse for money to go into the accounts of INI on a pound-for-pound and job-for-job basis than it is for it to go into town centre regeneration? I doubt that we will have that conversation; however, if we do, the narrative about why the public realm scheme works so well in Newcastle and why Dungannon could follow will be heard.

3.00 pm

Agriculture and Rural Development

Mr Deputy Speaker: Questions 4 and 10 have been withdrawn.

Farm Machinery

1. **Mr Armstrong** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what incentives are in place to encourage farmers to improve efficiency by sharing machinery. (AQO 352/11)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew): The sharing of machinery can, in some circumstances, help the efficiency of farm businesses. The market has been responsive in developing formal and informal commercial arrangements, such as machinery rings that facilitate the shared use of farm machinery where it makes business sense to do so. However, the main method by which farmers choose such efficiencies is through the use of specialist private contractors.

I remind those involved in machinery sharing that they have an important responsibility to ensure that disease risk-management strategies

are in place and that appropriate and effective biosecurity procedures are followed in line with Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) guidelines.

There are no initiatives at present specifically aimed at encouraging farmers to share machinery. However, my Department is consulting on a new tranche of the manure efficiency technology sub-programme (METS). The programme provides grant support to help towards the purchase of advanced slurry-spreading machinery and is aimed at improving nutrient efficiency and delivering environmental benefits.

Plans for the new tranche include a proposal to allow collective applications so that farmers can share machinery. Depending on the outcome of the consultation, METS may facilitate the sharing of slurry-spreading machinery such as trailing shoe systems. I am keen to consider including equipment sharing in future schemes, where appropriate. The feasibility and practicalities will be explored when we progress options for tranche 3 of the farm modernisation programme.

Mr Armstrong: I thank the Minister for her answer. Given the significant overhead costs involved in buying farm machinery, does she accept that the Department could increase efficiency in farms if it promoted the sharing of farm machinery? Does she accept that the farm modernisation programme does not sufficiently cover that area?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The farm modernisation programme provides quite small grants; as the Member will be aware, the maximum amount for which farmers can apply is £4,000. Therefore, the programme is not comparable with a big scheme such as METS, in which the cost of machinery is some £10,000. A farmer would need to have about 400 cows to make the purchase of that machinery beneficial for the farm business; that is why we feel that there is more potential to incentivise farmers to share the cost of buying big, expensive pieces of machinery. The farm modernisation programme would not necessarily work along the same lines as the METS scheme. However, we will look at machinery sharing in tranche 3 of the programme. It is right to incentivise the collective purchase of machinery in these difficult economic times.

Farm Modernisation Programme

2. **Mr Beggs** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline any changes she has made to the original criteria for the farm modernisation programme. (AQO 353/11)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: The main changes to the original farm modernisation programme criteria relate to the selection of projects when a call for applications is oversubscribed. Those changes were introduced as a result of the criticism of the first-come, first-served approach taken in tranche 1 and in response to the European Commission, which asked us to introduce additional selection criteria. The additional criteria are detailed in the explanatory booklet for tranche 2, which, I am pleased to say, is now available since tranche 2 opened for applications yesterday. Marks will be awarded under the four additional selection criteria of land classification, degree of modernisation, succession opportunity and e-communication.

Mr Beggs: The Minister argued that she favours the less-favoured areas under the criteria, as she wishes smaller, less profitable farms to benefit. Does she accept that, by using those criteria, larger farm will be included but that much of the east of the Province will be excluded?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: I make no apologies for choosing those criteria. Judging by all the data available to my Department, the challenging environment in severely disadvantaged areas and disadvantaged areas is serious enough to ensure that those farmers need to be incentivised to stay in business and to keep farming where the degree of modernisation is needed most and where the viability of those farms is marginal. In spite of everything that we have done over the years, there are still more farmers going out of business in severely disadvantaged areas. There are fewer opportunities available for them. A lowland farmer's land has better climatic conditions, so he can move to an area of farming that is more favourable in the current market. However, that option is not available to farmers in severely disadvantaged areas. They are in a much weaker position to continue their farming sustainability into the future.

Mr Bell: Could any changes be made to the farm modernisation programme or to any other programme if Europe lets the poultry farmers down and allows a derogation?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: As I said earlier, quite a few items are available for poultry farmers under the farm modernisation programme, including anti-vermin meal bins, tray stackers and identification for eggs. Items such as fans were put on the list specifically for poultry farmers so that they could have items that would help them to modernise their businesses, so they would hopefully then apply for tranche 2. As I said this morning, if there is a tranche 3, I will want to look at areas where we can help farmers whose farms are most in need of modernisation.

Mr P J Bradley: What assurance can the Minister give regarding help or guidance that will be forthcoming from DARD if it is discovered that an unintentional error has been made on an application form to the farm modernisation programme?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: I worked very hard to ensure that the form and the explanatory booklet that goes with it are as simple and easy to understand as possible. The form is only a couple of pages long, and our stakeholders are very keen that we minimise bureaucracy throughout the delivery of the farm modernisation programme. We worked very hard to do that. A number of errors were identified in tranche 1, and we looked at those on a case-by-case basis and saw how many of them we could sort out.

One of the benefits of tranche 2 is that the scheme is open for six weeks. Therefore, I ask farmers not to rush their forms and not to submit them in a panic, which was what happened the last time. It makes no difference whether their forms go in today or on the last day. We would like farmers to take their time, fill out their forms properly and ensure that all the items are put on their forms to enable us to help them to draw down the money, to help them to modernise their farms.

Mr McHugh: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. It is important to continue to support farmers in less-favoured areas for the reasons that were given. Farmers with modern, large farms should be able to survive on their own by now, given the amount of money that they have been given. Does the Minister agree that, due to their land type and rainfall, disadvantaged areas are still quite disadvantaged, compared with the better-landed areas of the North?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: I agree with the Member. In spite

of less-favoured area compensatory allowances and other support systems, the climatic ground conditions in severely disadvantaged areas mean that farming in those areas is much more challenging, and many of those farmers are on the margins of viability. For people who farm on hills, there are huge environmental consequences for those fields not to be grazed, and difficulties will ensue. Therefore, there is a need to support farmers in severely disadvantaged areas and in disadvantaged areas and to try to keep them in farming.

Farm Family Options Scheme

3. **Mrs M Bradley** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many applications have been received to date under tranche 2 of the Farm Family Options scheme. (AQO 354/11)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: There were 331 applications received during tranche 2 of the skills element of the farm family options scheme. Tranche 2 opened on 1 April 2010 and closed on 28 May 2010.

Mrs M Bradley: I thank the Minister for her answer. Given the many hobbies that can develop into sources of supplementary income, particularly for family farms, can the Minister explain why hobbies with potential for development were not considered for support under the farm family option scheme?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: Unfortunately, the Member has not given me a great deal of detail. Without knowing what those hobbies are, it is difficult for me to answer her question. Presumably, someone is not going to go into full-time jigsaw making. If the Member wants to come back to me with further details, I will be happy to look at that on a case-by-case basis.

Ms M Anderson: Go raibh míle maith agat. How many applications were received under tranche 1?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: The Department received 942 applications under tranche 1, which opened on 19 November 2009 and closed on 31 March 2010.

Mr Savage: What measures has the Minister taken to make funding available to people who are most in need of it? Can she give details

of measures that she has taken to increase awareness of the farm family option scheme throughout Northern Ireland?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: I believe strongly that the farm family option scheme is a good thing to do. The Department has tried to ensure that as many farm family members as possible get over the line with the scheme. We can learn lessons from previous tranches and publicise the scheme better; there is no question about that. The farm family options are available for farmers, someone who has a relevant business identification number, farmers' spouses — their husbands or wives — and their children. There is the ability to ensure that someone who has an idea and requires training and, perhaps, has barriers to accessing that training can do so. The farm family option scheme includes a childcare element. It is a progressive training model for farm families. I hope that as many people as possible take up the offer under the scheme and enable a better income to come into the family pot. If a farmer's son or daughter decides to set up business in or around the farm, training is available to help him or her to do that and to increase the economic well-being of the farm family.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question 4 has been withdrawn.

Sheep

5. **Miss McIlveen** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline progress on the electronic identification of sheep. (AQO 356/11)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: The introduction of electronic identification of sheep is an EU obligation. It requires the individual identity of sheep to be recorded when they are moved. My officials worked with a wide range of operators and stakeholders here and with their counterparts in Britain and the South to ensure that we introduced a system that implements EU legislation with minimum cost and burden to keepers while allowing the important sheep trade to the South to continue.

From 1 June 2010, all sheep moving off farms must be tagged with an electronic tag set. Markets, meat plants, export assembly centres and slaughter collection centres have had the

option of acting as central points of recording. That means that they use electronic readers to read tags and provide sheep keepers with a list of tag numbers in each consignment of sheep. The uptake of that role has been very good, and that has significantly reduced the impact of electronic tagging on keepers here, as they do not have to buy or use electronic readers for most sheep movements.

Overall, the implementation of electronic tagging of sheep has been highly successful. I am encouraged by the level of compliance in markets and meat plants. I am also encouraged by the level of uptake by keepers. By the end of September 2010, more than 8,300 keepers here had ordered electronic tags. That represents the vast majority of those who keep sheep.

Miss McIlveen: It is my understanding that there has been a number of problems, which have even been raised at EU level by a number of member states and, indeed, by Northern Ireland's MEPs. Given that problems exist, can the Minister assure the House that those that occur during the early stages of implementation and involve technology will not affect farmers' single farm payments?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: I am keen to take measures that do not impact negatively on farmers' single farm payments. I recognise that there are always difficulties in rolling out a new system, particularly when we have not initiated it and it has come from an EU directive.

I am clear on the need to protect our farmers from the burden of not only not being able to get their tags read but not being able to get tags readily. To date, there are about 18 different electronic tags available for use, and we have brought in our stakeholders. We worked closely with our sheep keepers and organisations. We worked not only with the UFU and NIAPA but with the National Sheep Association. We want to have tags readily available, ensure that they are read properly at central points of recording at plants, and so on, and try to minimise the problems.

3.15 pm

I accept that it is never easy to move to a new system. That is why in January 2009, when England, Scotland and Wales moved to double-tagging, I spoke to the Commission and tried to iron out any difficulties. I did not want to ask our

industry to go through three different systems in the space of 18 months and put it through the additional burden that flock keepers in England, Scotland and Wales had to go through. I am pleased that that has worked out and that it has not caused any problems. We accept that there have been some teething problems but not as many as might have been expected, and we are working with the industry to ensure that those are ironed out.

Mr Kinahan: Has the Minister made representations to DEFRA and, thus, to Europe to insist that all imported lamb into the UK has the same high level of traceability so that our local sheep farmers are not placed at a disadvantage when it comes to the additional cost burden?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: As was the case in the subject being debated this morning, different member states have differing views on electronic identification. As far as I am aware, the traceability element was the reason for bringing in e-ID, especially given the impact of the movement of sheep during 2001, when foot-and-mouth disease was prevalent. Britain's policy on sheep movements caused the Commission to go down that route with sheep e-ID. I am keen that our flock keepers are not disadvantaged in any way. I have discussed the issue with colleagues in DEFRA and have taken the issue directly to the EU Commission to ensure that our flock keepers are not at any disadvantage.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question 6 has been withdrawn.

Brucellosis

7. **Mr Brady** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on the brucellosis outbreak in Lislea and Keady and the action being taken to eradicate the disease. (AQO 358/11)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: We have reduced the herd incidence for brucellosis from 1.01% in October 2008 to 0.33% in August 2010, but the clusters of disease in Lislea and Keady are holding up the drive towards the complete eradication of the disease. Of the 24 confirmed breakdowns in the North in 2010, 17 were in the Keady and Lislea areas. Since January 2010, the Armagh divisional veterinary office has had 11 confirmed

brucellosis breakdowns, 10 of which have been in Keady or in the Keady area, and additional control movements are being employed in that area. A number of herds are being investigated for non-compliance with legislation or the conditions of official notices and, so far, have not received any compensation payments.

Since December 2009, the Newry divisional veterinary office has had 12 confirmed brucellosis breakdowns, seven of which were in Lislea. After the dumped foetus incident in late 2009, brucellosis infection was found in six further herds in the Lislea area in the early part of this year. Lislea has also been subject to the additional controls as described for Keady.

A large number of stored and recently taken samples have been analysed and compared with the DNA from the dumped foetus. As yet, no match has been found, but the Veterinary Service is continuing its investigations in liaising with the PSNI.

I recently met the Justice Minister and the PSNI Chief Constable to discuss what more can be done to deal with brucellosis-related fraudulent and criminal activity, which is having a severe impact on many innocent hard-working farm families in those areas. I am pleased that further PSNI assistance will be given, as those fraudulent activities are preventing the eradication of this disease, which could benefit all farmers from reduced levels of testing.

Mr Brady: I thank the Minister for her answer. I know that she is aware of the distress that the incidence of the disease has caused in the Lislea and Keady areas. She has answered the question to some degree. Does she agree that more robust measures and sanctions should be taken against those who are found to have deliberately infected herds?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: Yes. That is why I have been having meetings, not just with David Ford, the Justice Minister, but with Matt Baggott in the PSNI. Deliberate infection through fraudulent or criminal activity results in a great deal of inconvenience for innocent farmers in that area. That is why I am determined to do all that I can to eradicate brucellosis and will take any measures necessary to help me to do that.

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Minister for her responses; I particularly welcome the emphasis on the co-operation and assistance

of the PSNI in dealing with the issue. Will the Minister detail what resources, if any, have been made available to farmers in the locality to improve their biosecurity?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: One of the most important things that we have done in those areas is to set up farmers' liaison groups some years ago. They have been very helpful and have come up with some excellent suggestions; for example, some farmers have double-fenced to protect their herds' biosecurity. Three groups were set up: one in south Armagh, one in north Armagh and one in Fermanagh. I am grateful to all those who co-operated in those groups; without their support and suggestions, we would not have been so successful in getting the figure down to 0.33%.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Will the Minister inform the House whether she or her officials have given the names of suspects in the Keady and Lislea cases to the PSNI?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: Veterinary Service officials in the divisional veterinary offices in Newry and in Armagh are working closely with members of the PSNI in those areas, and there has been full co-operation between my officials and the PSNI on whatever information we have.

DARD: Access to Benefits

8. **Mr Doherty** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what progress has been made in relation to the maximising access to benefits scheme initiated by her Department. (AQO 359/11)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: Great progress has been made already through bringing together an effective partnership, including Departments, agencies and the community and voluntary sector, to work and drive the project forward. Lead organisations have been appointed to cover each of the 13 target zones, and they have trained 222 enablers to undertake the target of 4,200 household visits; to date, 4,272 letters have been issued to households, and 1,663 household visits have been completed.

It is a live project, with 200 to 300 visits taking place a week. However, I am pleased to inform the House that in three of the first 10 households visited, benefit entitlements have

already been identified and that enablers will work with households and agencies to ensure that those are realised. If that level of success is replicated across the 4,200 households, it will have a significant impact on our rural households suffering poverty and exclusion.

Mr Doherty: I thank the Minister for her detailed and comprehensive answer, which included many statistics. Will the Minister provide more detail on the three households that she mentioned?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: As I said, the project is at an early stage in relation to outcomes, but I am assured that, following a benefit-entitlement check on the three households, the projected figures are as follows: client one is projected to benefit from an additional weekly amount of £145 of income support; client two is projected to be entitled to an additional £120 full-rate DLA; and client three is a farmer who was projected to be entitled to £50 per week for working tax credit. That is fantastic news for those individuals and households.

The uniqueness of the project is that it is not just a signposting service; enablers will work with the various agencies to ensure that entitlements and benefits are realised. Moreover, numerous households have expressed an interest in being referred for Smartpasses, rural community transport membership, home-safety checks, dentists, computer classes and arts and crafts classes. All those have had a positive impact on addressing not only poverty but social exclusion and health issues.

Mr Cree: I thank the Minister for her replies thus far. What role can the community network play, and has it played, to encourage those who qualify for benefits to take up that entitlement?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: I give full credit to the community network for that project, because it was initiated out of a pilot project in Fermanagh, led by the Fermanagh rural community network. In that project, for every pound invested in the scheme, £6 was drawn down in benefits and grants for vulnerable people who really needed the support.

This is a case of working in partnership with the community sector, an example of the creativity and generating of ideas in that sector, and of government using that depth of knowledge, experience and expertise for us to make a real

difference. Although people in Fermanagh and Tyrone benefited from that pilot, people from right across the Six Counties will benefit from the project, and those 4,200 households will be in all our constituencies.

Not only will those people benefit from additional resources into their homes, local businesses and the local economy will benefit from the increase in money going into rural areas. I am delighted with the project. It has been of huge benefit, and I am pleased to have had the co-operation of the Health Minister in rolling it out. He was there when we launched it at Loughguile earlier this year.

Cycling

9. **Mr B Wilson** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what steps her Department is taking, or plans to take, to encourage cycling in forests. (AQO 360/11)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: My Department's Forest Service already makes provision for cycling at a number of forests. That includes mountain bike, family cycling and Sustrans trails. In addition, my officials are working with a number of partners to develop a mountain bike project in the Mourne. If the various funding, legal and operational issues can be finalised, that will represent a significant new cycling resource in the North. My officials are also working with other partners, including councils and the National Trust, to explore other cycling opportunities.

Mr B Wilson: I thank the Minister very much for her response. There is promising development there, but we do not develop our forests to their full potential, particularly for recreation and tourism. I notice that quite a lot of money is going into the Forestry Commission in England and Scotland to develop cycling in forests. Does the Minister agree that that could be developed in our forests?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: I certainly agree that we do not utilise our forestry resource enough. That is why I committed Forest Service to come up with a strategy for recreational and social use, so that we would commit Forest Service to develop business partnerships with suitable public and private providers to secure a more diverse range of facilities and attractions for visitors to our forests.

The Global Geopark in County Fermanagh is a great example of what can be achieved through partnership agreements. We worked closely with Fermanagh District Council to establish management agreements to improve recreation and education facilities. Other partnership opportunities are being explored with organisations such as the Tourist Board, the National Trust, the RSPB and local councils.

However, we could certainly do a lot more, and I want to work with other Departments and see what other funding can be used. We have the land, but not necessarily the money. If we work in partnership, we can bring maximum benefit to not only rural areas, but to visitors going to those areas.

Mr P Ramsey: I welcome the Minister's detailed answer. A main element of the Programme for Government is greater access to and participation in sport. Is there full liability insurance to protect from injury those using the public areas and forestry?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: Obviously, insurance is a big issue, and we work with our partners to ensure that we have proper insurance cover in place. I also take this opportunity to remind Members and people listening out there that we still have the ongoing situation with P. ramorum. If an area is blocked off or taped off, we ask people not to infringe on those taped-off areas and not to be spreading the disease further.

We have insurance for the activities that are in our forests. If we were trying, for example, to develop a cycling route with Sustrans, obviously the proper and full level of insurance cover for that activity would need to be in place before we could open the route to the public.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question 10 has been withdrawn. The questioners for questions 11 and 12 are not in their place.

3.30 pm

Dairy Industry

13. **Mr Savage** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what initiatives are in place to assist the dairy industry in achieving greater supply chain co-operation.
(AQO 364/11)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: I thank George for helping to get me into double figures; I am very pleased.

Most dairy farmers in the North of Ireland are members of producer co-operatives and already have close links with their supply chain partners, as those co-operatives own processing facilities and have strong relationships with retailers.

The supply chain development programme, which is funded under axis 1, is available to assist farmers in the creation and strengthening of their supply chains through greater co-operation and collaboration. To date, one group of dairy farmers has applied to the programme. That application has been approved. New and existing groups of farmers with partners that are further along their respective supply chains in the agrifood, horticulture, forestry and renewable energy sectors are also eligible to apply. Groups must comprise two or more farmers.

Private Members' Business

Knife Crime

Debate resumed on motion:

That this Assembly calls on the Minister of Justice to introduce tougher sentences for persons convicted of knife crime; and further calls on the Minister to bring forward a strategy to take knives off our streets in the wake of recent attacks and violence involving knives. — [Mr Easton.]

Mr Weir: The debate has been extensive. I am the twelfth Member to speak in it and not the thirteenth, so perhaps I should take comfort from that.

We have had a very mature discussion about knife crime, and there has been wide consensus around the Chamber. If someone in the Public Gallery had been blindfolded during the debate and not told who was speaking, he or she would have found it difficult to discern which party the Member was from, because the message from all sides of the Chamber was pretty consistent.

We need not reinvent the wheel. The issue is ensuring that we have best practice, appropriate sentencing and collaboration, and that we learn from examples elsewhere to deal with the scourge of knife crime.

The proposer of the motion, my colleague Alex Easton, highlighted that there is a growing problem: there were 938 incidents in 2009-10, which was a rise on the number recorded for the previous year. A number of Members said that knife crime in Northern Ireland is not as widespread as it is in other parts of the United Kingdom or even the Republic of Ireland.

However, we have a growing problem and we must ensure that we are not complacent. I come from north Down, which Mr McNarry highlighted, and although it has one of the lower levels of knife crime, even one knife crime is one too many. Dominic Bradley said that when someone is killed or injured in a stabbing the impact on the family of the victim and the tragedy is enormous. Any action that we can take to reduce that is something that we must look at.

In his speech, Alex Easton highlighted the successful use of the knife amnesty. Several Members referred to that, and it is something that must be borne in mind for the future.

As the proposer said, we must also ensure that, whatever sentences are put in place, there are sufficient deterrents, because, as Members said, prevention is better than cure. We must ensure that people do not carry knives in the first place. The fear of suffering at the hands of the law may lead people to leave knives at home.

On a number of occasions in the debate, the point was made that people who carry knives increase their chances of being a victim of knife crime instead of increasing their chances of defending themselves. The proposer of the motion also raised the issue of the retailer side and looking at measures such as test purchasing to highlight where there are breaches of the law. That is something that we need to push harder on.

A number of Members echoed the proposer's remarks. We do not have to reinvent the wheel. There are good initiatives elsewhere, particularly in Scotland, where similar conditions have led to a large increase in sentencing. That is something that we need to learn from.

Daithí McKay talked about the problems of accessibility and the fact that knives can be got fairly easily in a kitchen environment. That is something that makes the problem difficult to address. He also spoke of preventing a culture from developing. We already have a situation where many young people go out with knives thinking that they need them to protect themselves. Tackling the culture that makes that acceptable and the norm must be looked at.

Ken Robinson said that he had been raising the issue since 2002. At that stage, he was a lone voice. I am reminded of the old adage about a prophet being without honour in his own land. Ken is to be commended for his long-term interest in this issue. He also highlighted the issue of Scotland; there are examples elsewhere. He stressed that we need to tackle the source of the problem. He talked, as a number of Members did, of the need for education. This is not something that lies only within the ambit of the Justice Department, but is a wider problem and its genesis lies in the schools. It is something that the proposer raised, and he gave the example from his own youth of when police would come into the classroom. It was a good example of the action that can be taken. Ken Robinson also highlighted the need to bear down on retailers who abuse the situation and break the law.

Conall McDevitt dealt with a number of the issues and referred to the rise in the scale of the problem. He also spoke of the situation in Scotland the need for a joined-up approach and collaboration between the justice system, the police, the courts and the education system. It has got to be a joined-up approach to deal with this.

Trevor Lunn reminded us of a number of cases that had happened locally and the need for changes of culture and attitude. With a high level of honesty, he outed himself as one of these knife-wielding thugs. I know that there has been reference. Just before the Speaker goes mad at this point, let me say that we had a situation where the Finance Minister was recently described as "Slasher Sammy". I am sure that we do not want to see "Slasher Trevor". I am sure that he will take the very mature step of getting rid of his knife to set a clear-cut example and run the risk of horses with stones in their hooves limping around the countryside. I am an animal lover, but that is a small price to pay for Mr Lunn's putting away his knife.

Paul Frew dealt with the expectations of prosecution and imprisonment. There must be a joined-up approach and collaboration among a range of agencies. He said that carrying a knife puts one at much greater risk. We have to get away from the image of the hard man or the mean-looking person, and take a much more mature look at this. Mr Frew also highlighted the value of a knife amnesty.

Claire McGill accurately highlighted the impact on families. We tend to think of the numbers of incidents and victims, but for every direct victim, there is a wide range of people in families who suffer as a result of knife crime. Again, it is a question of changing mindsets.

George Robinson highlighted the issue of education, and said that for hardened or repeat offenders we must look where we can raise sentences.

David McNarry said that we were not as bad as other bits. He gave a number of local examples, said that we should not be complacent and stressed the advantages of deterrence. I said to Mr McNarry that I could make further remarks about his speech, but he threatened that if I did, he would set Trevor Lunn on me. That is enough to make me draw my remarks on David McNarry's speech to a close.

Dominic Bradley highlighted positive action by bereaved families and the very courageous steps taken by those who have suffered directly from it. Being proactive in this is something that everyone will commend. He gave a range of specific examples and went into some of the detail as to the particular education programmes that could be used.

The Minister indicated the degree of commitment that there is to address this issue. He said that there is no room for complacency and highlighted a wide range of things that the Department had already done.

He also highlighted the particular linkages with the issues of domestic violence and alcohol. He said that sentencing guideline mechanisms were out for consultation. We need to look at those to ensure that we get them right. In addition, he highlighted the work with the education sector. Although I would have liked him to have gone further and announced a knife amnesty, I welcome the fact that he at least kept the door open to that in future.

Although the figures in Northern Ireland are lower, we cannot be complacent. We need to send out a clear message by way of collaboration and multi-agency work to ensure that sentences are fit for the crime so that another family, in whatever part of Northern Ireland, is not subjected to the great tragedy of knife crime. I am glad that the House seems to have united behind this serious issue and spoken with a clear and united voice.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly calls on the Minister of Justice to introduce tougher sentences for persons convicted of knife crime; and further calls on the Minister to bring forward a strategy to take knives off our streets in the wake of recent attacks and violence involving knives.

Motion made:

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

Adjournment

Foyle: Speech and Language Therapy

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 up to 10 minutes.

Mr P Ramsey: I thank the Business Committee for allowing this debate to take place today. I have brought the debate to the Chamber because of specific problems for adults with learning difficulties who need speech and language services for communication difficulties. For many parents, it is an emotive and sensitive subject matter. I acknowledge and welcome the Minister's attendance at today's debate.

Good changes have been made in recent years in the Western Health and Social Care Trust area. I have been involved in the issue of speech and language therapy problems in Derry since about 2005. At that time, it was acknowledged that there was a £1 million deficit in services in Derry compared with what other children received across Northern Ireland, particularly in Belfast. Although there has been an improvement in access to speech and language therapy for children, we still, unfortunately, have a postcode lottery across Northern Ireland.

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

Last week, I attended a Barnardo's event in the Stormont Hotel, as all parties did. In Northern Ireland, we have to protect services for vulnerable children in particular. Early years provision is so important for them. Unfortunately, the statistics in Northern Ireland are not good: £80 a child is spent on early years; in Britain, the figure is about £600. That is a huge difference. I will speak particularly about adults with learning difficulties. As we all know, we are entering a crisis in public expenditure. The very least that we should do, as elected representatives, is champion and advocate those services. We should absolutely ensure that services for vulnerable children are protected. One thing in

life that we should be doing is looking after the needs of those special children.

I now turn specifically to the issue of speech and language therapy for adults with a learning disability. A few weeks ago, I was contacted by a parent of an adult with learning difficulties. She told me that her adult daughter had been assessed by speech and language therapy services. The assessment was that she required speech and language services for communication difficulties, but she had to wait two years for that assessment. That is unacceptable. She has now been informed that no communication services whatsoever are available for adults with learning difficulties in the Western Trust area. Services are available for people with dysphagia, which is a swallowing problem.

Only two speech and language therapists are assigned to people with learning difficulties in the Western Trust area, which stretches from north of Limavady to south of Enniskillen. Between them, they deal with 170 referrals a year. Roughly 130 of those are for people with dysphagia, that is, eating and swallowing difficulties. Those people are, quite rightly in the circumstances, prioritised for treatment.

3.45 pm

Around 40 people a year are referred as a result of having direct communication difficulties. I say to the Minister that no service is available for those people. I have checked with other trusts, and I understand that they provide speech and language therapy services that are specifically related to communication difficulties. One can only conclude that needs-based services are provided on a postcode lottery basis across Northern Ireland. I am sure that the Minister agrees that that is not acceptable in this day and age. It is not acceptable where equality, access and giving some heart and comfort to the parents of those with learning disabilities are concerned.

I checked the distribution of speech and language therapists across Northern Ireland. Belfast is best served in the speech therapist: population ratio, in that it has 18% of the North's population and 27% of speech therapy positions. The Western Trust area has 15% of Northern Ireland's population and 15% of speech therapists. That seems reasonable. However, the Department's figures show that the need for services in my Derry constituency is extremely high. In fact, more primary schoolchildren are registered as

requiring speech and language therapy in the Western Education and Library Board area than in any other board area in Northern Ireland. The logic of that is that the board requires, and the west requires, a higher than average number of speech therapists to deal with the area's needs, which is what we are talking about.

There is the additional issue of geography to consider. It takes two hours to travel from one end of the Western Trust area to the other. That is a further stretch on resources for parents who are already badly in need and under pressure. Therefore, I ask the Minister to outline what special considerations are given to the geography, population distribution and registered needs of a trust area when financial resources for particular services are being allocated.

I wrote to the Western Health and Social Care Trust. I have a letter with me in which it acknowledges that, at present and given current resources, it is unable to accommodate the needs of the people to whom I referred, that is, adults with learning difficulties. From its reply, I understand that the trust intends to ask for additional resources from the commissioning body.

Will the Minister make a commitment to help adults with learning difficulties? They are among the most vulnerable people in our society. Their main carers, often their parents, are under severe lifelong financial pressures and emotional and physical stress. We know that, because we see them every day of the week. Mary Bradley, Martina Anderson and Raymond McCartney see them. Those who represent the constituency have seen, on the coalface, the distress, discomfort and disadvantage faced by such parents, who hang on a thread and hope against hope that some level of service will enable their child with learning difficulties to communicate with them, even in a small way. They hope that their children will be enabled to express an opinion or an emotion. Expressing emotion is where the difficulty is, so the parents involved should be given peace of mind.

I will not speak for my 15 minutes, Mr Deputy Speaker. We need to protect those in our community who are in stress and disadvantage. We in the Chamber must send out a clear and strong message that we need to protect services for vulnerable people, including children and adults with special needs. I know that the Minister will support me when I say

that, if we do nothing else, we should ensure that such people are the most important in our community. We need to stand behind them.

Ms M Anderson: Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom a rá go bhfuil mé iontach sásta bheith ag caint inniu. I am very satisfied to be speaking in the debate, which I thank Pat Ramsey for securing.

This is an issue in which, over the past number of years, he has invested a great deal of time and effort, and that should be acknowledged. Indeed, the people of Derry do acknowledge it. I also acknowledge the fine job done by speech and language therapists who work across the various health trust areas, and I stress that any difficulties in the service are not down to them. In my experience, they are hugely dedicated and professional people, who, in the Health Service, provide an essential service for children and adults. The therapists have not failed anyone; they have been failed by a lack of investment, which has led to an inadequate service.

Sinn Féin has long supported demands for adequate provision and facilities for speech and language therapists across the North and, specifically, in Derry and the north-west. We have raised the matter consistently with the Western Health and Social Care Trust and with social services, and our people have had conversations with the Minister in Committee. In particular, I lobbied the Minister about the need to establish a multi-disciplinary team, of which speech and language therapists were to be an integral part, in order to diagnose children with autism at the earliest possible age. Thankfully, those teams have now been established, which I appreciate. We should acknowledge positive moves where they have occurred, particularly in recent years.

Nevertheless, a lack of provision is evident across the North, and the standard and level of provision varies greatly between areas. Pat referred to a postcode lottery, and that should be taken account of. We have to ask ourselves how far we have come since 2006, when the Children's Commissioner reported that more than half of children who required assessment or speech therapy in the Western Health and Social Care Trust area could not access the service. The commissioner also found that speech and language therapy services are allocated on exactly the basis that Pat Ramsey described — by postcode lottery, meaning that the area in which

one lives has a huge bearing on one's expectation of receiving services and on the wait for assessment and treatment. In response, since 2006, we have not gone far enough.

In my constituency, as Pat Ramsey, Raymond McCartney, Mary Bradley and I have said, we have had to deal with many parents of children who face long and agonising waits to be assessed by speech and language therapists and to receive the necessary therapy. Indeed, yesterday, I dealt with parents who were concerned about services at Lakeview Hospital, in Derry, being removed from their child. So, even when people have them, they cannot even say to themselves that they are now in place to be utilised in the hope of some improvement. They have to battle constantly with the health authorities, in the first instance, to get the assessment and treatment that their child needs, and then, once they are receiving it, to retain it. Remember, any delay in putting in place the required speech and language provision can have long-term consequences. Early intervention is vital to successful treatment.

There are historical reasons, which have now been addressed, for the difficulties in training and retaining speech and language therapists in the north-west, the main one being that therapists in Derry were paid less than those anywhere else. Thankfully, that kind of inequality has been redressed, but the fact remains that, as well as insufficient funding for speech and language therapy as a whole, there is still a lack of provision in Derry. That must be addressed, and proper resources must be directed into that vital service, because, unfortunately, without proper access to speech and language therapy, many children are condemned to a life of poor educational achievement, resulting in poor employment prospects, the poor development of social skills, low self-esteem and emotional and behavioural problems. Early intervention by speech and language therapists can help to prevent those problems and more, and can increase the life chances of many children. In the long term, that would undoubtedly be cost-effective.

I am aware that the Minister is consulting on an action plan to improve services for children and young people with speech and language and communication needs, and I urge as many people as possible to respond to the consultation. I sincerely hope that the plan will provide the impetus necessary to make the improvements that are so badly needed

in speech and language provision here. Then, perhaps, we can put in place the assessment and treatment services that our young people should have as of right.

Mr McCartney: Ar dtús, ba mhaith liom mo chuid buíochais a ghabháil le Pat Ramsey le haghaidh an díospóireacht seo a thabhairt os comhair an Tionóil inniu; is ábhar tábhachtach é. Tá mé an-sásta go bhfuil an tAire anseo freisin.

I thank Pat Ramsey for securing the debate; he thanked the Business Committee for allocating the time. Pat has been a long-time advocate of speech and language therapy provision, and those of us who live in the city are well aware of the number of times that he has raised this issue. He and the Minister will appreciate that all six MLAs from the city have always weighed in behind the need for such provision.

I welcome the fact that the Minister is here for the debate. He will accept that there was a lack of speech and language therapists in the trust that services Derry city and the Foyle constituency, and he has taken steps to change that situation. Martina Anderson pointed out that the trust's therapists have done sterling work, and, indeed, stretched themselves over many years. We all commend the great work that has been done.

Pat Ramsey detailed the statistics, of which the Minister is aware. Down the years, a number of factors contributed to the lack of provision, one of which was the fact that speech therapists who worked in the north-west received lower rates of pay than their counterparts in other parts of the North. I welcome the fact that the Minister has addressed that situation; that is the type of action that we like to see.

As was mentioned, the Minister is consulting on an action plan. When he addresses the relevant issues at Question Time or during debates, the problem often comes down to one of resources. However, the action plan could allow for innovative thinking on ways to fill the gaps in provision. I am not trying to minimise the resource problems, but there may be other ways in which the Minister feels that the issue can be addressed. I hope that he is in a position today to give us a sense of how he envisages the action plan rolling out.

Perhaps the Minister could raise another aspect of the issue with his Executive colleagues. The previous contributors to the debate pointed out

that the lack of provision and care at a particular time in individuals' lives has a knock-on effect, as reflected in their lower educational attainment and low self-esteem. Employability becomes an issue and has a further knock-on effect.

Perhaps, as part of an innovative process, the Minister will seek to speak to some of his Executive colleagues about the ways in which other Departments could assist. The obvious spin-off from getting the proper resources in place at the right time is that the resources required for people later in life can be reduced through taking such positive actions early on.

The Minister's presence is welcome; it shows that he has knowledge of the issue, and we look forward to hearing what he has to say. Whatever action plan he takes forward, we hope that it will address the fundamental issues that face the constituency that we represent. I am sure that I speak for all Foyle MLAs, and they will say so themselves, when I say that we will support him in whatever he takes forward. We will do so in the hope and desire that, somehow, we can tackle what has been a long-term issue.

Over the years, in fairness, the trust has tried to address many of the problems, but sometimes it is a matter of resources. There are times that we look enviously at other areas, and, perhaps, it appears as though we come to the Chamber simply to criticise.

There is a lack of provision, yet there seems to be adequate provision in other areas. Therefore, in many ways, we see this as an issue of natural justice and want a sense of equality. I hope that the Minister can give us a view of how he will deal with the issue.

4.00 pm

Mrs M Bradley: I am delighted that the Minister is here today to listen to the debate, and I congratulate my colleague Pat Ramsey for bringing the Adjournment topic to the House.

The provision of speech and language therapy in the Foyle area is, and always has been, poor enough, to say the least. As a member of the Committee for Education, I am more than familiar with the difficulties that schools experience when they attempt to secure timely and appropriate assistance when a child requires additional help. That has been no mean feat for educators and parents alike.

In preparation for today's Adjournment debate, I sampled experiences of the provision of speech and language therapy in mainstream and special schools. The consensus is that initial assessment is sometimes fairly quick and sometimes not, and, in some cases, if someone is lucky enough, he or she might get an assessment within three to six weeks. However, the problems arise when it comes to referral for practical therapy. That can take months, may be spread over two or three school years and is given only in short blocks. That is not helpful and, in fact, is even more frustrating, as the child then has to join the queue again for additional therapy. Therein lie the problems.

Speech and language therapy is a serious issue in Foyle. For example, I found that in one nursery class in a primary school, 13 children have been referred for assistance. That is an awful lot of children from one class. If those children do not get help soon, it will be difficult for them to go through their studies without feeling embarrassed. Children feel embarrassed and catch on at an early age that they are different to other children. We should not allow them to go through education like that. We always talk about educating our children in their early years, and that is the right time to start. However, really and truly, so much self-confidence is lost, and issues of isolation arise. Indeed, many children become the victims of bullying. That is not acceptable in this day and age.

I could lay this debate at more than one Minister's door. The responsibility lies not only with the Health Minister, but perhaps with the Education Minister and, in some ways, the Employment and Learning Minister. It is imperative that the Minister for Employment and Learning consider the content of the debate and moves to assist Magee campus to develop further and to include speech and language therapy in its prospectus to encourage local students to take up the subject. The proposed increase in student fees will make it more difficult for students to leave home to study. Therefore, Magee must do all that it can to encourage our local students to study there.

The Minister of Education should also take note of the debate and consider whether opportunities exist for interdepartmental working to improve the situation. Given that the main difficulties are first discovered when a child enters full-time education, it surely becomes a problem for the Education Minister's

attention. I hope that the Ministers concerned will take note of the debate, and I look forward to some proactive suggestions at their earliest convenience.

For some reason, those of us who live in the west tend to suffer more than people in other board areas. Some people tell us that that is not the case, but we know for a fact that it is. The other Members present know that as well. Extra resources are badly needed in the west. If we get those extra resources, the families and educators of the children will be very grateful for that assistance, and those children, in later life, will be very glad of it. I urge the Minister to do whatever he can to help with the situation.

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Mr McGimpsey): I am fully aware that the ability to communicate effectively is very important in today's modern, busy society. It is integral to and makes a very important contribution to people's lives at home, in school or in the social environment. Adults and children have speech, language and communication needs that range from specific language problems, such as a stammer, to the difficulties that are associated with specific conditions, such as an autistic spectrum disorder, hearing impairments, acquired brain injury and others.

Speech, language and communication needs can include difficulty understanding what people say, difficulty speaking or forming words and sounds, and difficulty in using language in appropriate social contexts. Most speech, language and communication needs are identified in childhood, but they may be acquired later in life. For example, they may be acquired after a stroke or a brain injury.

The House will be aware of my commitment to people with speech, language and communication needs in Northern Ireland. Over the past number of years, my Department has provided considerable extra investment, including £1 million for the provision of speech and language therapists and assistants and £4 million to develop and establish multidisciplinary teams, which include a speech and language therapist as a key element. In addition, £200,000 in recurrent funding was provided for service development.

Such investment has helped to ensure that my target to reduce waiting times to nine weeks by March 2010 for allied health professionals, including for speech and language therapy,

was met by all trusts. That is a considerable achievement when compared with average waiting times of 28 weeks in 2008. However, it may be the case that, owing to recent constraints on expenditure, difficulties are being experienced locally in maintaining that standard.

Mr Ramsey talked about a two-year wait, while Mrs Bradley talked about a one-year wait. That is news to me, and I am not aware of that. If those Members write to me to provide me with the details, I will undertake to investigate the matter further, because that is not the information that I have. Children in schools have to see an educational psychologist, who will refer them on. I wonder whether there has been a breakdown in that process and where that process lies. Educational psychologists are provided by education services, and speech and language services come through the health trusts.

There is no room for complacency, and that is particularly true of the standardisation of access criteria across the service in Northern Ireland. Earlier this year, my Department commissioned an exercise to help bring about improvements to the commissioning and planning of services through a service redesign.

Members will recall that, in September of this year, I launched for public consultation a speech, language and communication therapy action plan for children and young people. Although it specifically deals with children and young adults, it will impact positively on the further development and provision of speech and language services for everyone, and I remain steadfast in my commitment to drive forward service reform in that area. When the action plan is finalised, accountability for its implementation will be lead by the Health and Social Care Board and the Public Health Agency, and I anticipate the launch of the final document in January 2011. I am confident that the action plan will help to provide the strategic direction for the further development of speech and language services over the next two years.

My Department funds 30 places annually on the speech and language therapy course at the University of Ulster at Jordanstown to attract new people to the profession. I hear what Mrs Bradley says about Magee College, but Members will be pleased to know that there is good demand for those courses. My Department is also developing a draft physical and sensory disability strategy, which will be subject to

public consultation in the near future. As part of its aim, the strategy will seek to co-ordinate services regionally, including speech and language therapy, and to provide person-centred services based on clinical need.

The Western Health and Social Care trust, which covers the Foyle constituency, employs around 50 staff, working across the different specialities in speech and language therapy. Referrals for speech and language services can come from a range of professionals, including GPs, health visitors and school nurses. Treatment can be provided in healthcare facilities, but, increasingly, those services are provided on an outreach basis; for example, to children in schools. As of 14 October, there were 2,056 clients known to speech and language therapy services throughout the Western Trust. Of those, 54 make up adult learning disability caseloads. The trust's speech and language therapy service for adults with a learning disability is provided by two speech and language therapy staff.

The service receives between 160 and 170 referrals a year. Seventy-seven per cent of its clients have dysphasia, which relates to feeding and swallowing difficulties, and the other 23% have speech and language difficulties. Like other trusts in Northern Ireland, the Western Trust faces a difficult challenge in aligning supply with the demand for services because of its finite resources, but it must prioritise referrals in that client group to ensure that the risks associated with the potentially life-threatening implications of dysphasia are mitigated.

I must stress that the Western Trust is fully aware of the potential adverse, knock-on effect of that prioritisation on clients who do not have dysphasia but who present with speech and language communication difficulties. However, the trust fully understands the importance and significance of the need to provide an accessible, timely and first-rate service for all clients. It will bid with the local commissioning group, which is the process that I have in place now, and with the Health and Social Care Board, which is responsible for commissioning services, to resource the required moneys for service provision.

Regionally, trusts are generally meeting the waiting time target of nine weeks for speech and language clients. Although I acknowledge that some people are waiting longer than that, I am

not aware, as I say, of one- or two-year waits. In fact, my information is that the longest that any of the Western Trust's 291 clients had to wait for speech and language therapy services was 21 weeks. Therefore, to ensure that my information is accurate, I am keen to hear if people had to wait longer than that.

The Western Trust's waiting times and targets for speech and language therapy services have been good. However, over the past number of weeks, that situation has changed and deteriorated, and people are waiting longer. We all agree that people in the Foyle constituency deserve better. Unfortunately, they are not the only ones who have been affected by imposed Budget cuts. The demand for those services in that area has increased, but the resources to meet the necessary increase in staff numbers simply are not there. I do not have to remind anyone in the House about the very severe financial difficulties that we are facing and about the fact that waiting lists and waiting times for a range of services continue to rise while demand increases and funding reduces. Patients often have to wait longer than they expect for essential treatment and care. Adequate resourcing is clearly essential.

Considerable effort has been made to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of speech and language therapy provision, as demonstrated by the huge improvement in waiting times that I referred to, but those improvements are now under threat. In fact, the entire health and social care service is under great stress, because of a lack of funding. As I said before — this fact is based on Treasury figures that were published in July — Northern Ireland now has the worst funded Health Service in the whole of the UK. We are behind England, Scotland and Wales. Historically, we were behind Wales and Scotland, but we have also fallen behind England, where there are huge areas of prosperity and wealth. That is not something that we should be proud of. There is no substitute for a properly funded Health Service that can save and transform lives for the better. Without the right amount of funding, people will be left in pain and distress. I, therefore, ask the House to support me in ensuring that that does not happen.

Adjourned at 4.16 pm.

Committee Stages

Northern Ireland Assembly

Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment

14 October 2010

Tourism (Amendment) Bill (NIA 30/09)

Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Alban Maginness (Chairperson)
Mr Paul Butler (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Leslie Cree
Mr Paul Frew
Mr Paul Givan
Mr William Irwin
Ms Jennifer McCann
Dr Alasdair McDonnell
Mr Gerry McHugh

The Chairperson (Mr A Maginness): The Committee now commences its clause-by-clause scrutiny of the Tourism (Amendment) Bill and the first draft of its report. No issues arose at last week's preliminary scrutiny of the Bill. I will seek the Committee's position on each of the six clauses and the schedule. I remind members that they may give only their view of the clauses as drafted. To date, no amendments have been proposed by the Department or the Committee.

Clauses 1 to 6 agreed to.

Schedule agreed to.

Long title agreed to.

The Chairperson: Are members content to work through the Committee's draft report on the Bill paragraph-by-paragraph indicating agreement or raising any suggested amendments? I remind members that we have been through the issues in previous sessions.

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson: Are members content that the executive summary, as presented in paragraphs 1 to 12, stand part of the report?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson: Are members content that the introduction, as presented in paragraphs 13 to 17, stand part of the report?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson: Are members content that the summary of the Tourism (Amendment) Bill, as presented in paragraphs 18 to 24, stand part of the report?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson: Are members content that the summary of consideration during pre-legislative scrutiny, as presented in paragraphs 25 to 32, stand part of the report?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson: Are members content that the summary of consideration, as presented in paragraphs 33 to 46, stand part of the report?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson: Are members content that the clause-by-clause consideration of the Bill, as presented in paragraphs 47 to 49, stand part of the report?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson: I advise members that the Committee will consider the entire report, the minutes of proceedings, the minutes of evidence and written evidence at its meeting on 4 November 2010. That concludes that aspect of our business.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Committee for the Environment

21 October 2010

Waste and Contaminated Land Bill (NIA 10/09)

Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Cathal Boylan (Chairperson)
Mr Patsy McGlone (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Roy Beggs
Mr Trevor Clarke
Mr Willie Clarke
Mr Danny Kinahan
Mr Alastair Ross

Witnesses:

Mr Karl Beattie	<i>Department of the</i>
Mr Denis McMahon	<i>Environment</i>
Mr Donald Starritt	
Ms Anne Tohill	

The Chairperson (Mr Boylan): At its meeting on 28 September, the Committee decided to defer consideration of three clauses until they had had sight of the amendments that the Department agreed to propose at the Bill's Consideration Stage. Those departmental amendments have now been included in the members' information pack. I advise members that the Department stresses that those amendments have still to receive the Executive's approval. We will go through each clause that the Department has agreed to amend, and I invite members to comment as we go through those.

Clause 1 (Fixed penalty notices for offences under Article 4)

The Chairperson: The departmental amendment to clause 1 would raise the upper limit of the range of fines for fixed penalties from £200 to £400. That information is included in the first page of the letter dated 15 October. The

Committee recommended the amendment. Are there any questions?

Mr Beggs: I declare an interest. My dad owns land that is used as a legal inert landfill site.

The Chairperson: As there are no other comments, I will put the Question.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, subject to the Department's proposed amendment, put and agreed to.

Clause 1, subject to the Departments proposed amendments, agreed to.

Clause 5 (Councils to enforce Articles 4 and 5 of 1997 Order)

The Chairperson: I refer members to the departmental amendment to clause 5, which would extend enforcement powers to local authorities. I advise members that the amendment would allow councils to take enforcement action in the event of a failure to present appropriate waste documents. The amendment was recommended by the Committee. Do members have any comments?

Mr Beggs: I declare an interest as a member of Carrickfergus Borough Council.

The Chairperson: We are going to be here all day, Mr Beggs.

Mr T Clarke: I declare an interest as a member of Antrim Borough Council.

Could you repeat what you said about the amendment?

The Chairperson: The amendment gives enforcement powers to local authorities.

Mr Donald Starritt (Department of the Environment): The Committee requested that councils have powers to issue fixed penalty notices in the event of failure to produce appropriate waste management documentation. At the moment, only the Department can do that.

The Chairperson: It would bring council powers up to the level of the Department's powers.

Mr Starritt: It would also allow councils to retain receipts.

The Chairperson: As there are no other comments, I will put the Question.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, subject to the Department's proposed amendment, put and agreed to.

Clause 5, subject to the Department's proposed amendment, agreed to.

Clause 8 (Appeals against remediation notices)

The Chairperson: I refer members to the departmental amendment to clause 8, which would provide for the Planning Appeals Commission (PAC) to charge a fee to hear an appeal. I remind members that the Committee recommended the amendment to avoid the appeals mechanism being used to delay a fine being imposed. The Department advised that, under current law, there is no mechanism for the Planning Appeals Commission to charge a fee and that it would require an amendment to the Bill to introduce that power.

Could you clarify that for the new Committee members?

Mr Karl Beattie (Department of the Environment): Clause 8, as originally drafted, amended article 58 of the Waste and Contaminated Land (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 to provide for all appeals against remediation notices, regardless of which regulator issued those, to be heard by the PAC. However, no appeal fee was provided for in the original clause. The Committee expressed concern that, by not doing so, there was a danger that unscrupulous operators may seek to delay meeting their obligations. The amendment simply provides for the Department to prescribe a fee for such an appeal. That fee would be at the same level as a planning appeal, which is currently £126.

The Chairperson: As there are no other comments, I will put the Question.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, subject to the Department's proposed amendment, put and agreed to.

Clause 8, subject to the Department's proposed amendment, agreed to.

New Clause

The Chairperson: I remind Committee members that they also sought to propose two amendments in the absence of the Department's agreement to do so. Members

have copies of the draft Committee amendments. The second of those amendments gives the highest level of Assembly scrutiny to secondary legislation that alters fixed penalty fines listed in the Bill and the existing Order.

On the advice of the Examiner of Statutory Rules, the Committee asked the Department to make sure that any alteration to fixed penalty fines will be subject to draft affirmative procedure in the Assembly. Higher and lower levels of fixed penalty fines are provided in the Bill — £100 to £400, as we discussed earlier — and three other fixed penalty fines were included in the Waste and Contaminated Land Order 1997 by an amendment in 2007 that, by default of the existing Order, were subject to negative resolution.

The amendment will ensure that the four fine levels cannot be altered without Assembly approval. That would be consistent with other legislation relating to fixed penalty notices that is currently being considered by the Assembly. It is to give us an extra bit of scrutiny.

Mr Ross: In light of the letters from the Minister and from Glassdon Recycling we might need to give our first proposed amendment more consideration.

The Chairperson: We are coming to that.

Mr McGlone: I apologise if this has already been discussed, but what kind of time frame do we have for the Bill?

Mr Starritt: Do you mean the time frame for the Bill's commencement?

Mr McGlone: Yes.

Mr Starritt: We spoke before about the fly-tipping protocol, which is a key feature of the Bill and will need to be in place before the relevant clauses could be commenced and take any effect.

Mr McGlone: I will rewind a bit there. What is the time frame for the protocol's implementation?

Mr Starritt: We are hoping to consult on the protocol within the next six weeks.

Mr McGlone: How long will the consultation last? Will you outline what will happen from that consultation to the decision-making point and the Bill becoming law? There is a bit of a problem with Acts being implemented.

Mr Starritt: Subject to the Assembly process, we hope that the Bill will receive Royal Assent by February or March. At that stage, many of its provisions could be brought into operation straight away. The fly-tipping provisions would need to wait until the protocol was in place, but we hope that that would happen as soon as possible.

Mr Denis McMahon (Department of the Environment): Obviously, we cannot pre-empt what will come out of the consultation process. However, we are hopeful that by the time that the Bill receives Royal Assent, we will have the protocol in place.

Mr McGlone: So, you think that the protocol should be in place by February?

Mr McMahon: That is the intention. It could be commenced at that point.

Mr McGlone: Do you have a particular date in mind for the whole thing being in place, subject to Assembly approval?

Mr McMahon: The intention is to have it all in place by the spring.

The Chairperson: We had agreed that everything, including the protocol, would be set. I know that we are dealing with different circumstances, but our previous experience of the passage of Bills is a warning to all of us. The Taxis Act has commenced, but three years later some of its provisions have still not been implemented. We need to make sure that that does not happen with this Bill. That is what the Committee is talking about.

Mr T Clarke: Could a further clause be put in that would kill the Bill off completely if it is not enacted by a certain date? That would make the Department move a bit more swiftly.

The Clerk of Bills: We would have to consider that, Chairperson, and come back to it.

Mr T Clarke: I say that because the Department might take it more seriously if it realised that all its work could be lost. If we set a time frame for the legislation to be implemented, and if, after that, it is not implemented, all the Department's work would be lost. As you rightly said, and as we identified last week, the Taxis Act has been a fiasco. There is no point in us going through this whole process again with other Bills if they will not be enacted.

The Committee Clerk: The Committee and the councils agreed that they wanted a lot of the Bill to go ahead now. To kill the whole Bill would be detrimental. However, the Committee sought from the Department a commitment that the clauses relating specifically to the agreement on waste management will not be enacted until an agreed protocol is put in place.

Mr T Clarke: You have, perhaps, taken me up wrongly. I do not want to kill the Bill. The Bill is an improvement. However, my problem is that we are going through this process, and if the Department does not get its act together, we will have wasted our time again.

The Chairperson: For clarity, I agree with Trevor Clarke on that point. We have been through this process, and there is no point in this Bill sitting on the shelf. Mr Clarke is asking that we look at the inclusion of a clause that will set a time frame, and if the legislation is not enacted within that, it will be gone. We want to go forward and make the Bill work, but we are going on what has happened —

Mr Kinahan: That is terribly dangerous.

The Chairperson: I agree, but I will give it every consideration; it is a request from a Committee member. I will let the Clerk of Bills come in on that.

The Clerk of Bills: On a procedural point, the Committee is up against the wire in its efforts to complete its report and meet its reporting deadline. It is, however, open to individual members, as MLAs, to approach the Bill Office and seek an amendment. There is time to explore that option. However, for the Committee to start to explore additional amendments at this point, when it is in the middle of its formal clause-by-clause scrutiny — in fact most of the clause-by-clause scrutiny has been done — and is about to report, is not feasible.

Mr McGlone: Following on from Trevor Clarke's point, on the wider front there seem to be management or delivery issues on the part of the Department; I do not know which. Trevor and I went through that Taxis Bill consideration, as did you, Chairperson, and as regards this and other legislation, we do not come here day after day to sit and go through this stuff for there to be no delivery. Whatever other legislation there may be, we should get clear guideline delivery dates as to when, in fact, the legislation will be in place. I know that that will be subject to other

factors. However, I would like to think that there is, at least, someone there who can say that the anticipated date of enactment of this provision is such and such, so that the legislation can come into operation. Having a Bill or Act sitting on the shelf gathering dust is not a response. We, as a Committee and as elected Members, need to be assured that someone, somewhere, is driving this on.

The Chairperson: I totally agree.

Mr Beggs: I think that it is a strange and crazy proposal to booby-trap the Bill so that it will be killed off. There is already a date after which it will be killed off if it is not through the legislative process, so why would we want to add another date? There is a clear date, which everybody is aware of, and unless the Bill is through the Assembly and enacted by that date, it will be killed off anyway. Why do you want to add an earlier date?

Mr T Clarke: Maybe you are not hearing very well over there.

Mr Beggs: Maybe I am not.

Mr T Clarke: We have waited three years for a previous Act to be implemented. Had it had a date on which it had to be implemented — within a year after it received Royal Assent, for example — we would not be sitting here, three years down the line, with it still not having been implemented.

All that work has been done. In no way am I suggesting that we kill off the Bill. I am suggesting that we can make the Department move a wee bit more swiftly if we can make it see that all its work will be lost if, by a certain date after its commencement, it does not have certain things in place. It is to make the Department move more swiftly.

Mr Beggs: I do not think that the Committee should do that. Individuals can pursue that option if they wish.

The Chairperson: I understand. However, the key issue for this Committee is that it does not waste its time. The Bill needs to be enacted as soon as it receives Royal Assent. We are talking about less than a year. We are not talking about three years. The first part of the Taxis Act 2008 will be enacted three years after Royal Assent, in March 2011, hopefully.

Mr McGlone: We hope.

The Chairperson: Denis, I know that you want to come in, but do you understand the Committee's view? We have taken advice on the clauses, and Mr Clarke wants this moved forward, as do the rest of us. We do not want to kill the Bill. Would you like to respond?

Mr McMahon: Only to add a little extra context. We have listened to all the points that have been made, and we accept those. A key issue has been agreeing a threshold between local government and the Department. That has been a major sticking point for some years. Some local government organisations — it is important to say “some” — proposed using a 20 cu m threshold, and the Minister is minded to put the consultation out on that basis. However, we need to formalise that and put it into a consultation document. The point that I am trying to make is that there has been progress on that issue. We are very much of the view that that now needs to go out to consultation, with a view to having the protocol in place by the time of Royal Assent. Obviously, I cannot comment on the other Bills mentioned. However, I reassure the Committee that there has been movement on the issue.

The Chairperson: Could you clarify the time frame for the consultation?

Mr McMahon: We see the consultation going out in six weeks.

The Chairperson: Will the Minister make a commitment during Consideration Stage to pull it all together? We want to see the Bill enacted. It is a good piece of work and a good Bill, and it will have an impact on the ground in helping constituents. It would be helpful if you would come back to us to tell us what the Minister says about making a commitment in the Chamber. You should also keep us updated on the consultation. You said that that would go out in six weeks and run for, perhaps, 12 weeks. Sorting out the threshold protocol is what could hold the whole process up.

Mr McMahon: One of the issues has been that we have heard two very different views. The local government organisations' view is that there are already severe pressures on them around fly-tipping. The Northern Ireland Environment Agency's (NIEA) view concerns the practicality of having a 20 cu m threshold, because it may not be feasible for it to manage anything more than that. There has been movement across that gulf, which has been a

big cause of the hold-up around the protocol. That being resolved, it is a matter of setting down the roles and responsibilities. We do not envisage any problems with that going out.

The Chairperson: The threshold needs to be resolved through the consultation, which, hopefully, will happen, even though there are differences between the NIEA and the councils. Do you think that that will happen? In the absence of that being resolved, is there a plan B?

Mr McMahon: I think that we can reach agreement. This is a significant movement from the position that the NIEA held previously, and moves towards what the councils want. The only caveat is that we cannot predict whether, during the consultation, the councils that are not signed off on a 20 cu m threshold will want to discuss it. It has not been formally signed off that all 26 councils would be prepared to accept the 20 cu m threshold.

Mr T Clarke: The process to decide the distance seems like a Mexican stand-off between the councils and the Environment Agency. That could continue for ever. If that happens, when would it be reasonable for the Department to come along and say what the threshold protocol will be?

Mr McMahon: I have not made myself clear. The Mexican stand-off is over. The Minister is minded to move to 20 cu m. Inasmuch as we have been getting feedback from local government, the line that we have received from it is that it wants the threshold to be 20 cu m. The Minister has moved in that direction. That is the intention.

The Chairperson: That is what we are saying. We need acceptance. We need to move on and have the matter to go to consultation.

Mr T Clarke: You mentioned a further caveat, Denis. You said that, when you get to that stage, some councils still might not buy into it. Surely it would then be a case of saying, "Tough". You will say that the threshold is 20 cu m or whatever you say it is. If you do not say, "Tough" at that stage, your Mexican stand-off continues.

Mr McGlone: How do you suppose that you would get to that stage?

Mr McMahon: I am not saying that I expect that to happen. I would not necessarily use such terminology. One way or another, we have to get the consultation over and out of the way. All that

I am saying is that it would be inappropriate of me to pre-empt the views of local government before the consultation. But, yes, your point is correct in the sense that we must come to a view. There has been a great deal of movement on the issue. We have reached the point at which the Minister is minded to go with a particular threshold. Subject to the consultation taking place, the issue should be resolved.

The Chairperson: To be honest, Denis, we will continue to press you on that. We need that matter to be resolved.

Mr McGlone: I am seeking a wee bit of clarity that my point was picked up on. I asked for a commitment or details from the Department on its legislative time frame for all the legislation that is coming before us, not just on this item, that item or another item. We can pump all the Bills that we like through the Committee, but if they are not delivered, what is the point? We need to know that someone, somewhere, in authority can actually say that the Department has a time frame and is working to a particular date. We need that assurance. If we do not get it, the Committee will start to reprioritise.

The Chairperson: Obviously, that is a separate discussion. However, we will certainly take that on board and ask the Department for an update on all Bills.

We must get back to the original discussion on the new clause regarding the setting of fines, which will give the Committee the opportunity to scrutinise the level of fines.

Question, That the Committee is content with the amendment, put and agreed to.

New clause agreed to.

New Clause

The Chairperson: The Committee has also requested an amendment to provide the Department with powers to introduce standards for quality of recycled material that is collected by councils, should that prove necessary in the future. I advise members that, before they agree the amendment, they may wish to consider additional information that has been provided to the Committee by RecyCo, Glassdon and the Minister. The Department has also answered the Committee's queries on rejection rates from recycling plants, the cost of recycling to each

council and glass recycling levels, as well as responding to the letter from Bryson Recycling.

I refer members to the Committee's draft amendment, which is included in members' packs.

Mr Ross: I understand the rationale behind the draft amendment. The Committee was well-intentioned in what it tried to do through the amendment. However, in light of new information that has been provided, it may actually be a pretty bad amendment to put forward, given that it would tie the hands of councils in an area in which they have authority. It may also severely disadvantage some businesses. The Committee may need to reconsider the amendment and not put it forward.

The Chairperson: Yes, we should reconsider.

Mr Beggs: We have been given a lot of information, including rejection rates, from various recycling and waste management areas in Northern Ireland. I am unclear about the percentage of foreign material that ends up being shipped out among material that is supposedly recycled. I assume that those figures refer to material that has come out of material recovery facilities (MRFs) to go to landfill sites. However, it has been highlighted that some MRFs are poor at recycling and that the quality of material that is meant to be recycled might not be as high as it should be and might, subsequently, limit others' ability to reprocess it.

I view this amendment as enabling the Department to bring in regulations should it need to. Therefore, I consider it appropriate that we propose it. It is pointless to put material through MRFs and pretend that it is recycled and then ship it off to Third World countries to go through another process of recycling or be put in a landfill somewhere else. It is appropriate that this amendment be included.

The Chairperson: I will give my view and then I will ask Denis to step in. This amendment was well intentioned, but am I correct in thinking that 23 out of the 26 councils are operating a co-mingled system?

Ms Anne Tohill (Department of the Environment): That is correct.

The Chairperson: We have to consider the impact that that will have on councils. I know that this is an enabling amendment, Roy, and I take on board what you said. However, making

the amendment would give the power to enact the new clause. If, for instance, a council comes along to a recycling facility with material, the manager of that facility could turn that material away because he deems it to be contaminated. We visited a recycling centre. We know that there is a model out there that is working, and the co-mingled system is also working. Those facilities are reaching their targets.

I am concerned about the impact that this would have on councils. Ultimately, if this new clause were implemented, it would have serious consequences for councils, and the Committee would be saying that there is a better model. This is about competition, doing the thing right, value for money and meeting targets. In the light of some of the information we have received, I do not support this amendment. Co-mingling seems to be working, because 23 councils are meeting their targets. Having said all that, however, we need to look at the quality issue.

Would other members like to comment?

Mr Ross: I am happy to propose that we do not put this amendment forward in the Committee's name.

Mr W Clarke: I second that proposal.

Mr Beggs: Before we vote on this, I would like to ask a question. How can the Department impact on the quality of current MRF schemes to prevent market forces and the cost element driving down the quality of recycling, leaving it as poor as possible, and to ensure that there is an incentive to have high-quality recycling from MRFs?

If we allow low-quality recycling, market forces will drive councils to whoever is producing the lowest quality recycling, because they are putting as little effort as possible into it. What method is there to govern the quality of material coming out of MRFs? I am not talking about the amount of material that is rejected; that is a separate issue. This is about how the material that comes out of MRFs can be recycled, rather than being shipped off to Third World countries.

Mr McMahon: Anne can talk about this in a bit more detail. However, I will make a general point. One of the useful things that has come out of this debate is that it encourages us to look again at the whole issue of how MRFs operate. We have looked at some of the councils across the water that have achieved

40% recycling rates. Places such as Cardiff, Nottingham and Leicester achieve 40% recycling rates and are similar in most respects to Belfast; they are similar in size and have similar characteristics. Having talked to some of the MRF operators there and having seen what they are doing, it is clear that they are constantly working on improving those operations and that the market is driving it. Much of what they sell is sold locally and that is how they do business. Some of the material is being transferred to Europe and some further afield, but the majority of the business and the improvements that they are making to the MRFs are clearly driven by the market. That is encouraging in a sense, but, over and above that, we accept that there is a need for standards. Anne, would you like to say a bit about MRF standards and quality protocols?

Ms Tohill: I want to make a couple of points. The Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP), which is the independent and expert body on recycling and reuse, has undertaken a number of studies to test the quality line of MRFs, including one last year where it tested 20% of MRFs across the UK. The findings were that some MRFs are producing very high-quality recyclables. As a result of that work, proposals were made to set up a discussion group. In fact, the operators and reprocessors met to discuss what the standards should look like. There was a consensus that there should not be a quality standard as such. The UK reprocessors set out very clear standards for MRF operators, and those are well understood. They considered weight-based standards, where the material would be sampled, and that work is still under way. However, the findings are very important because they demonstrate that MRFs produce quality material if they are set up correctly.

The technology for sorting waste materials is changing rapidly, and, over the next five to 10 years, we anticipate that a lot of materials that currently cannot be recycled will be recyclable. We are also aware that some MRFs in Northern Ireland are taking materials from councils that cannot be reprocessed by local companies, because they are not yet at that stage, but there are markets in the UK where that material can be sold and is being reprocessed. If those MRFs were not taking that material, it would end up going to landfill. Therefore, we are conscious that we do not want to do anything that will be detrimental to the amount and quality of materials that we recycle.

There is a perception that a lot of the material that is exported is highly contaminated. However, we do not have evidence of that. We do not have the hard facts from the NIEA or anywhere else that a lot of the material that is being exported contains high levels of contamination. If that is the case, we understand that it is returned to Northern Ireland, but the checks that the NIEA carries out at the border indicate that the material does not contain high levels of contamination. Therefore, we are trying to ensure that we take all that information on board. Where there are gaps as we develop our policy, we will take a balanced view, and any policy that we take forward will not be detrimental to one part of the market and prejudiced towards another.

Mr Kinahan: I get the impression that the key word in the new clause is “may”, but the word “must” is used for councils. Your argument is that this would only be relevant if there were really a case for legislating for this, but you are saying that, at the moment, there is not a case.

Ms Tohill: We do not have the hard evidence for that.

Mr Kinahan: But there might be hard evidence one day, in which case the new clause should be included.

Mr Ross: It could be inserted at a future date.

The Chairperson: There are 23 councils operating co-mingling systems, and they are reaching a certain percentage. However, if this clause were included and became law, it would take only one phone call to the council for it to be enacted, if there is a case of contamination or anything else.

Mr McMahon: One of the issues that has come out of this is that it is a private sector operation. You can see through accounts in various letters — I am not going to comment on the detail of those — that there are different views, in which commercial interests are being reflected. One scenario is that a private sector operator — using a co-mingling system or otherwise — a MRF operator; or another type of operator could push and make the case, and if the power were in place, we would be expected to make regulations. However, given the potential impact on the market, we would have to consult on any regulations that we make. That is how it could influence the market in the future.

Mr Beggs: Presumably, this new clause would enable you to make regulations. However, in

deciding whether to make regulations, you would have to determine whether a strong argument was made, what is practically feasible and what methods would be used. One of the issues that I picked up on during the evidence was that textiles cause problems when they are co-mingled.

There may be things that you can do, but they can be done only after careful consideration of everything. Currently, there are no controls, and MRF operators and councils dump everything in their so-called recycling bins, with no regard to what comes out at the other end of the process.

Ms Tohill: If the operators were producing material of very poor quality, they would not continue in business. We heard anecdotal evidence that MRF operators have gone out of business because they were not producing the quality required. The market will sort it out, because if operators do not produce quality materials, they will not get the price for it and will not have a market to supply to. It is the same with markets abroad. A few years ago, the market collapsed and stockpiles of paper were built up, but the quality in Northern Ireland was of a high enough standard that it was protected. As a result of the lack of evidence at the moment, we are not clear that a policy intervention is required.

Mr Beggs: It has been said that that could be introduced subsequently, but that would require primary legislation. The proposed new clause would only be enabling legislation that could sit dormant and never be enacted if there is no requirement or decision by the Minister or the Department to do so.

Ms Tohill: We would be concerned that that would send out a signal that the Department was actively thinking about imposing it. The waste framework directive is very clear that that collection method that is the most beneficial technically, economically and environmentally should be the preferred option, so the amendment could be perceived as removing the economic argument for councils, because there will be a cost associated with it. In a way, you would be moving the costs up the chain so that the ratepayer would bear costs, whereas, if the market is left to sort itself out, the reprocessor would bear its share of those costs.

The Chairperson: OK. We have a proposer and a seconder for the Committee's proposal not to table the amendment. I will need to take a

vote. Mr Beggs, are you of the opinion that that amendment should remain?

Mr Beggs: I have not heard an argument as to why a judgment cannot be made by the Minister and the Department at a subsequent stage, having taken all the circumstances into consideration, such as the directives and the economic aspect. That is a decision that the Minister could take. I am concerned that we could ship low-grade material to Third World countries, with everyone feeling happy that we have recycled when we may not have done so properly.

Ms Tohill: The statistics show that the UK market for recyclables exports a huge amount of paper. Of the 8.8 million tons that are recovered, 3.8 million tons are reprocessed in the UK and 4.4 million tons must be exported, because there is no market for it here. If we did not have those marketplaces, the reprocessors and operators —

Mr Beggs: Sorry, I have no objections to going through legitimate recycling processes and exporting —

The Chairperson: We need to move this on. I will take a quick point from Mr McGlone, and I will put it to the vote.

Mr McGlone: Is there not a market for it because there is too much of it, or is it, as Mr Beggs suggested, because the quality is slightly inferior and the marketplace here is taking the best recyclables? In other words, where is the quality control? Does anyone keep tabs on the exported stuff, or are we comfortable enough with just getting it out of these islands?

Ms Tohill: Every country has its own standards. Under the Transfrontier Shipment of Waste Regulations 2007, the NIEA checks the loads as they cross the borders, and if there are high levels of contamination, those loads are returned. From what we have heard from the agency, six loads were returned in the past few years and, of those, only three contained municipal waste. Quality checks are carried out at the borders. The waste is also checked when it arrives in the destination country, and, depending on what processes that country has, it can also be returned to Northern Ireland from there.

Mr McGlone: That all depends on the quality of the checking on both sides.

Ms Tohill: It does. However, if you take the paper market, different grades of paper get different prices. That is just part of the market operating and does not mean that the paper is still contaminated and cannot be recycled; it just means that it is of a lower grade and will have a different end use.

Mr McGlone: Do you mean that it is not contaminated according to the standard that we would use?

Ms Tohill: No. There are the highest-quality materials, which get the highest prices, but there are still markets for lower-quality materials, which will be recycled into lower-quality products. We need those markets.

The Chairperson: We have been through the issue. At the time of the amendment being drafted, most of us thought that it was a reasonable suggestion. We have found out more information. The proposal is to not table the amendment, so I will ask for a show of hands from those in favour of withdrawing it.

Mr McGlone: Sorry, I was called out when you were going through all of this. Could somebody review it for me?

The Chairperson: There was a suggested amendment from the Committee about the quality of the recycling. We have discussed the issue, and I feel that it is not appropriate to table the amendment. We have 23 councils using co-mingling and three councils using source separation, which was the basis of the suggestion. The councils are reaching targets. We have received three letters from three different groups, and it is not appropriate for the Committee to support one viewpoint. The impact of the amendment could be to support one business model over another.

The amendment says “may”, but if it is made, its provisions could be enacted fairly quickly. The Committee should not be dealing with that issue; we should be talking about value for money and proper separation. Certainly, quality is a major issue and should be looked at, but it is up to the Department to keep checks on that and ensure that it is carried out properly. The question is whether Committee members support the amendment’s inclusion or its removal.

The amendment is for the insertion of a new clause after clause 6, to be titled “Quality of waste to be recycled”. The amendment was

brought forward by the Committee. However, we have reviewed the situation and received letters with other information. There is a proposal from Mr Ross, supported by Mr Willie Clarke, to not move the amendment.

Mr Kinahan: You are being a little one-sided. The amendment was suggested so that if, in the future, things are found to be wrong in the system, we can change it.

The Chairperson: I totally agree. However, there is a possible impact of that. Some members sit on councils and know that councils sign up to contracts. Be under no illusion that the whole issue came from a visit and a discussion about the co-mingling system and the source separation. The amendment came from the whole issue of quality of materials. You have to look at the impact that the amendment would have on councils. I am not saying whether it would or would not have an impact.

Mr T Clarke: Patsy is clever enough to make up his own mind, but, given that he has not heard the whole debate, perhaps Anne Tohill should explain how we could be interfering with the markets. She has a very good grasp of the arguments, so perhaps she could go over them again.

Mr McGlone: Thank you very much for your kind comments, Trevor. The amendment states:

“The Department may by regulations provide that in carrying out their duties under Article 20, district councils must meet such requirements as may be prescribed, in relation to the nature and quality of waste which is to be recycled.”

What is the current process for determining the quality of waste? How are the requirements on the quality of waste to be recycled enforced at the moment? In other words, what does the amendment add to or subtract from what is already there?

Mr McMahon: There are two forms of regulation. First, as we said, the marketplace is regulating. Factors are in play to encourage MRF operators here and across the water to improve the quality of recyclates that they produce, and there is evidence that some local operators are investing to do that. The second level of checking, which Anne Tohill mentioned, applies to the Transfrontier Shipment of Waste Regulations 2007. Any recyclates shipped out of Northern Ireland have to be checked by the Environment Agency. In

addition, Anne may wish to say something about MRF standards and quality protocols.

Mr McGlone: I was not talking about spot checks as a means of enforcement; I was asking what regulations are in place. In other words, the Bill proposes regulations for x, y and z, but what exists at the moment?

Mr McMahon: We do not have any regulations that tell councils how to collect waste, which is what I understand the amendment would do. We have no powers over that; as I understand it, the amendment would move us into that territory.

Mr Beggs: That needs to be clarified.

The Chairperson: That is fine. I know that Mr McGlone was out of the room at the time, but we are rehashing arguments. This is a Committee amendment, and the proposal is to either support or remove it, so I will put it to a vote.

Mr McGlone: I have to say that I could not vote on it, because I am not satisfied about the types of controls that exist now.

Mr Beggs: The market —

Mr McGlone: We know where the market goes, which is why we are in the banking crisis that we are in.

Ms Tohill: There are two standards. The MRF operator has a standard and when council waste arrives at its gates, it is checked and if the load is contaminated, it is returned. Furthermore, if waste is not accepted, the MRF operator imposes a hefty fine on the council. When waste goes through the MRF operator, the operator tests the waste and rejects any contaminated waste. The reprocessor specifies a standard for the MRF operator. Therefore, as waste passes through the system, there is a series of checks, and if the operator does not meet that standard, it is up to the reprocessor to reject the material and either tender a new contract or look elsewhere.

As we said, we have anecdotal evidence of MRF operators having been closed down because they did not produce material of high enough quality to meet market demand. However, there are buyers in the UK for material produced by our operators, and those buyers are saying that it is of a high quality. Not all material can go to the local reprocessing sector because, in some cases, reprocessors do not accept materials because, as yet, they do have the technology to

turn them into a product. However, elsewhere in the UK, it is taken and turned into quality products. We also have in place and are working on quality protocols and standards for certain waste streams, all of which means that if that waste is treated in a certain way, it is no longer considered waste because it has been turned into a quality product. Those standards are being worked on by the Department and the Environment Agency.

The Chairperson: I remind members that, if they wish to do so, they can bring an amendment to the Chamber as a private Member.

Question, That the Committee is not content with the amendment.

The Committee divided: Ayes 4, Noes 2.

AYES

Mr Boylan, Mr T Clarke, Mr W Clarke, Mr Ross.

NOES

Mr Beggs, Mr Kinahan.

New clause disagreed to.

The Chairperson: Mr McGlone abstained from the vote.

The Committee, therefore, will not table the amendment.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Committee for Social Development

21 October 2010

Caravans Bill (NIA 17/09)

Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Simon Hamilton (Chairperson)
Ms Carál Ní Chuilín (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Sydney Anderson
Mrs Mary Bradley
Mr Mickey Brady
Mr Jonathan Craig
Mr Alex Easton
Mr Tommy Gallagher
Ms Anna Lo
Mr Fra McCann

Witnesses:

Mr Colm McQuillan	<i>Northern Ireland</i>
Mr Connor Smith	<i>Housing Executive</i>
Mr Stephen Martin	<i>Department for Social Development</i>

The Chairperson (Mr Hamilton): I invite to the table Stephen Martin from the Department's housing division; and Colm McQuillan, assistant director, and Connor Smith, assistant principal officer from the Traveller project team at the Housing Executive. You are all welcome.

Members have been provided with a clause-by-clause table, which should be consulted as necessary, along with copies of the Caravans Bill folder. Folders have been updated with all relevant correspondence, including a letter from the Department, dated 19 October 2010, and advice from Legal Services on squatters' rights. I remind members and witnesses that today's proceedings are being recorded by Hansard.

I ask the witnesses to kick off the meeting. Then, we will have what will probably be more of a discussion, rather than the usual question and answer session.

Mr Stephen Martin (Department for Social Development): The focus of this initial session is the operational impact of the Bill. Colm and Connor are in a much better position than I am to talk about that. Therefore, if you do not mind, I will hand over to them.

Mr Colm McQuillan (Northern Ireland Housing Executive): The Housing Executive welcomes the Bill. It gives us considerable control and covers the rights of quite a few Travellers who live on our sites, especially on serviced sites. From our perspective, the Bill is welcome.

The potential problems that we may incur, because of the amendment that has been tabled to clause 1 to change the period of three months to one year, are manageable. That must be put in the context of the number of families affected: we have a relatively small number of families who would, or could be, affected were we to find ourselves in an overholding position or if a legal challenge were levied. We will put in place alternative arrangements for the provision of proper accommodation for Travellers. Last month, we brought a significant paper to our board that put forward a new approach to making sure that appropriate accommodation, and enough of it, is put in place to meet the needs of that community.

A query was raised on whether we would find ourselves in a position in which we would be carrying out large-scale evictions of families. It has not happened to date, and it will not happen. For the past seven or eight years, in the absence of the Caravans Bill, that has not happened. We have not found ourselves in that position in the past and do not anticipate finding ourselves in that position in the future. The Bill will not have a significantly adverse effect on the day-to-day management of sites and Traveller accommodation.

The Chairperson: That is the crux of it. The Committee has been caught between wanting to support a good Bill enthusiastically and not wanting to have an adverse impact in that area. Our discussion and scrutiny of the Bill has morphed from talking about people in caravans at the seaside into talking about Traveller sites every week. Collectively, we have been concerned that the initial Bill, which included a three-month period, and even the amendment, which would extend that to 12 months, might not have enabled the Housing Executive to do its job. Our concern was more about the

management side and whether that would lead to a significant change in how the Housing Executive goes about its work.

Some of the figures show that a significant proportion of Travellers remains on emergency and transit sites beyond the 12-month period. We understand why that is the case and do not criticise that in any way. However, we understand the difficulty in managing the whole issue, and, as Mickey said last week, we are faced with a situation that has developed out of the failure to resolve that issue over many years. Will you clarify this point for the Committee? Are you saying that, in effect, your management of Traveller sites will not significantly change?

Mr C McQuillan: I can confirm that.

The Chairperson: A concern was expressed that the 12-month requirement would mean that, after 11 and a half months, people would be moved off sites to nowhere, effectively. We all understand the issues. Will that happen?

Mr C McQuillan: No; that will not happen. Our major issue is the lack of site provision. As I mentioned, we have put to our board a significant paper on how we will address that shortfall. We are reconsidering all our plans on suitability, on areas of highest need and on public lands to determine whether we can put in place appropriate accommodation to meet the needs of the population. The vast majority of the Traveller population is housed suitably in social housing or on long-term permanent sites, which are covered under clause 1. Although some still live on temporary and emergency halting sites, we are content to manage them there until we find appropriate provision. Although we could do so, we have no intention, at this time, of becoming involved in evictions based on the existing site licences. That situation will remain as it is. The basic problem is putting more sites in place. If we are successful in that, the issue will become a moot point in relation to the impact of the Bill.

The Chairperson: In practice, how will you mitigate the risk of a tenancy being established after 12 months?

Mr C McQuillan: At present, that is merely a potential or hypothetical issue. It has not been challenged in the courts yet. There would have to be a case that uses the Bill as a challenge. The Housing Executive is actively pursuing long-term sites for all those who are currently

staying long term on temporary sites. A number of actions are already in play, such as planning applications, to determine whether we can put in place permanent sites for those individuals and free up existing temporary sites and emergency halting sites. We will have to wait and see how we deal with any potential legal challenge.

The Chairperson: You might be able to take certain actions under advice in advance, rather than taking the suck-it-and-see approach and waiting until it gets to court. You could make it clear that licences are for 12 months and remind people who move on to the sites, well in advance of the end of that period, that the licence lasts for 12 months only.

Mr C McQuillan: That is already the practice. We issue the licence, and, at the end of the licence period, we advise that it has expired and that people remain there on a day-to-day basis under our sufferance, as it were.

The Chairperson: We all understand why that is the case.

Mr C McQuillan: The legal side is covered by the licence that we issue at present, which is usually for 28 days. We can extend that to three months. After three months, we advise people that they remain there on a day-to-day basis and outside the normal terms of that licence. Under our co-operation policy, however, we allow them to remain on the site.

The Chairperson: We understand that. Thank you.

Mr Craig: I have almost got the answer to my question now, Colm. In practice, the Bill will not really make any difference to the way in which you carry out your operation with Travellers. Our concern was whether it would add complexity or make life impossible for you in carrying out what you do in practice.

Mr C McQuillan: That is correct. We have been managing that issue to a greater or lesser degree for quite a long time. We were aware of the issues well in advance of the Bill. Our major push is to put in place appropriate accommodation that fits the needs of that client group and not to find ourselves on the periphery by using certain types of legislation to move on or put pressure on that client group. The answer is more sites.

Ms Lo: Colm, I agree with you about the difficulty, which is mainly the lack of sites for Travellers. You said that there was never a

problem with mass eviction, but that was before this legislation, which may require you to take that option.

Perhaps the legislation will give some impetus to the Housing Executive to try to find more sites. What is your timescale, because the legislation will be law, possibly by May 2011? How quickly can you find and establish additional sites?

Mr C McQuillan: To be honest, the \$64,000 question is whether we can do so within the timescale. We have planning applications at various stages that would offset particular problems in a number of areas. The applications are complex and at an early stage, and we continue to complement them as we see fit at present.

As recently as last month, the Housing Executive board ratified a policy and procedure to continue a full review of all our lands and public lands throughout those areas of need to determine whether we could quickly establish appropriate accommodation for that client group. I cannot say definitively that the situation will not change, because I do not know what will come up. I can say only that we will reflect on what we did in the past and that we do not intend to find ourselves carrying out large-scale evictions from any of our sites.

Ms Lo: We could be talking about two, three or five years before more permanent sites for Travellers can be found and established.

Mr C McQuillan: That is if permanent sites are what they require. The issue of permanent sites is covered well by the Bill, in which they are afforded the same protection. Once we establish a permanent site, the Bill affords protection that is very similar to that of Housing Executive tenancies. It is for those who wish to express their culture by way of travelling that we must put in place transit sites.

Our problem is that some of our transit sites are becoming silted up. At present, not all of the individuals on those sites express a wish to remain. Some stay for three, four or five months. The situation is dynamic, which is a sign of the times. Some have stayed on for seven, eight or nine months or a little longer.

In the Craigavon case, families have been there for an awfully long time. They want a permanent site, and we are actively looking for a permanent site in that area. We hope to have something in

place within the timescale that you mentioned. We do not have that problem on the other sites. They are not past the year, and, given our experience, we do not anticipate there being a problem. Additional transit sites would address the transient nature of the client group. We do not have a large waiting list of Travellers silting up our sites and expressing a wish to remain there. We have a particular problem in a particular area; namely, Craigavon. Outside Craigavon, we do not have the same problem.

The Chairperson: That last question strayed into more operational issues, rather than focusing on the consequences of the Bill. Members should focus their questions on the Bill. We can talk about Travellers' issues, but only how they relate to the Bill.

Mr S Anderson: I apologise for being late, but I was meeting more than 100 people. Colm touched on the situation in Craigavon. As a member of Craigavon Borough Council, I declare an interest. As you will be aware, and going by the number of objections that you receive, there are major problems in obtaining the required number of sites. That is a big problem for the future. If you were to go down the line of evictions, it would create a major issue of where the evicted families would go. Evictions encourage illegal encampments, which are also a major problem. You talked about 12-month licences, but, as Jonathan said, nothing changes. After an eviction, people live day to day, and that will continue for ever and a day, or until you get another suitable site for them. Is that what we are saying?

Mr C McQuillan: Absolutely.

Mr S Anderson: What about the changes?

Mr C McQuillan: The Bill will provide the security of tenure that we want for permanent sites for Travellers and caravan dwellers. The anomaly is that there is the potential for individuals to take a case because they have lived in a certain place for more than 12 months and, therefore, would like to exercise their right to continue living there. We intend to militate against that by putting in place additional sites for those who wish to live in a particular area on a permanent basis. As I said, we brought a significant paper to our board and are putting in place a series of actions to militate against that eventuality, including a recall of all Housing Executive lands in the Craigavon area and in all areas in which there is a need. We have concept plans that

we would like to bring to that, and, as you are aware, we have outline planning permission for a particular site in the Craigavon area that would militate against that problem.

We cannot foresee what will happen to Travellers' lifestyles and expectations, which are, in fact, changing. Nearly four years ago, when I took up post and assumed responsibility for Travellers, there were 90 to 100 unauthorised encampments each year throughout Northern Ireland. Last year, with the exception of Craigavon, where, in fact, numbers went down significantly, there were only nine. Therefore, the number of people who access sites has reduced significantly. That reflects a number of factors, including the economic downturn, changing lifestyles and Travellers' expectations.

We are committed to putting in place proper accommodation to meet the needs of that client group. In the past two years, we have opened several major schemes, including 21 brand new units on the Monagh bypass, which took nearly 100 people off the roadside and into a social group housing scheme on which they are all very keen. Our other schemes include outline planning permission for additional group housing schemes on the Glen Road, which will go ahead within the next year. We have upgraded quite a few facilities by installing showers, electricity and other services on sites that we own or on which we co-operate with other landlords. We have invested significantly in that. We expect to be successful in putting in place accommodation that will meet the needs of those who might be affected by the 12-month period. That is what we intend to do. We understand that there will be difficulties in doing so, but we are committed to pushing forward.

Mr S Anderson: I appreciate the difficult job that you have to do. We are all aware that it is not an easy task. However, do you agree that there are great difficulties in obtaining sites, not only in Craigavon, but possibly in other areas? It will take time to overcome those problems. I am sure that you know what I am talking about. Do you envisage the Housing Executive taking decisions to evict Travellers from a site at any time after the 12-month period has elapsed, or will that not happen?

Mr C McQuillan: I cannot guarantee that we will not evict any of our tenants from any of our dwellings or sites at any time in the future. It would be impossible to give such a guarantee

because the reasons for moving folk out of one of our properties or sites can vary enormously. It could be for antisocial behaviour and all sorts of bits and pieces. At this point in time, we have no intention —

Mr S Anderson: I am saying that it is unlikely that you will be in a position to evict, because of the lack of sites.

Mr C McQuillan: We have no intention of forcibly evicting folk at the end of the 12-month period. I am not saying that it will not happen, because the circumstances of particular individuals could dictate otherwise. However, that might not necessarily be to do with the timescale, be it three, six or 12 months. It could be to do with other matters. The answer, as we see it, is the provision of additional sites. We have made a commitment to putting in place such additional sites. We put a significant piece of policy to our board to address that. We hope that that will be successful, but who knows? There are many things that the Committee —

Mr S Anderson: Can you give us a timescale for when you think that you can get some additional sites in place? Do you have any idea?

Mr C McQuillan: I cannot give you a timescale, because there are so many variables that affect that: the capital value of the site; planning permissions or housing need in a particular area; and so forth. We cannot, therefore, put our finger on that. However, we have identified where the need is and are actively pursuing arrangements to offset it, and we understand that it will take time. That would have been our intention regardless of whether the Bill was coming forward. The Bill as it stands gives protection to those who are on permanent sites, and it also gives us more time to work that through than had it not been amended. Our intention is to put in place the accommodation that is needed for that particular client group. I cannot go any further than that.

Mr F McCann: First, the group housing sites on the Monagh bypass and the Glen Road are second to none. They are excellent developments. I appreciate that there could be occasions of antisocial activity or serious breaches of whatever tenancy agreement there might be and that there are concerns that you may have to evict people. However, when you move into the situation of a day-to-day-lease with Travellers, I take it that they will not be moved

against their will for as long as there is no other provision into which they can be moved.

Mr C McQuillan: In the eight years for which we have been responsible for the accommodation needs and unauthorised encampments arrangements, we have taken into account the particular circumstances at the relevant times. We have not and will not move folk on when we do not deem it reasonable or right to do so. I cannot give a cast-iron guarantee that, at the end of a period, we will not have to exercise our rights in doing so. However, I must put that into the context of the number of families with whom we deal who would be affected. It is a relatively small portion of the population. The numbers involved are not large. We are working towards putting in place new group housing schemes that will offset that. Given all the factors that we outlined, of which you are aware, we are also putting in place, as quickly as we can, transit and emergency halting sites that meet the needs of that client population.

Mr F McCann: It may already be included, but, given the concerns that have been voiced around the table, is there a possibility for a built-in review mechanism for the Department or the Housing Executive of how that operates?

Mr Martin: That issue is included in the clause-by-clause table, and I am happy to address it when we get to that stage.

The Chairperson: I thank the witnesses for their evidence. We have heard from the Housing Executive and, recently, we received advice from Legal Services. We now need to determine whether members believe that the Caravans Bill, with the specific proposed amendment, would unacceptably alter the Housing Executive's operational ability to manage and provide Travellers' accommodation. Are members content with the evidence and the assurances that have been given?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson: That is helpful. On that basis, we will proceed with the clause-by-clause scrutiny.

Thank you very much, Colm and Connor. We can release you now. Stephen, however, is in for the long haul.

During the clause-by-clause scrutiny, members will be asked to settle our final position on each clause — not necessarily today, but as we go through the Bill — subject to amendments.

The Department has put forward a number of amendments, and the Bill's sponsor has suggested one amendment. When the Committee puts forward an amendment that is not supported by the Department, the Clerk of Bills will take away the proposal and draft the appropriate wording for consideration at a subsequent meeting. If members do not feel that they are able to agree a clause, they must state so clearly during the clause-by-clause scrutiny. In such cases, members will be asked to set out their proposed amendment, and the consideration of the clause may then be deferred until the next meeting. To speed up the process, answer any questions and give advice, the Department will attend all the Committee's sessions on clause-by-clause scrutiny.

As all members have a copy of the clause-by-clause table, we will run through the clauses in the order in which they appear therein.

The Committee Clerk: The table that is included in members' information packs is all that members should need, and extra copies of the Bill are available.

Clause 1 (Application of this Part)

The Chairperson: We will begin with amendment A. Clause 1 sets out who will gain the protections of Part 1. As currently drafted, only caravan owner-occupiers who live in their caravans as their main or sole residence and who rent a pitch on a so-called protected site will have the protections of the residential agreement. Amendment A deals with seasonal caravan users on protected sites, and the Committee previously agreed that it would not seek to amend the Bill at this point for that reason and that consideration of the issue would be left until clauses 7, 8 and 15. We will come back and explain that at a later stage. Are members content with that and happy to continue?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson: The Bill, as drafted, would probably extend the protections of Part 1 — the residential agreements, etc — to users of all Housing Executive Traveller sites. Amendments B(i), B(ii) and B(iii) had been proposed to exclude some or all Traveller sites from the protections in Part 1. Having received departmental and independent legal advice, the Department sought advice from the Human Rights Commission on the compatibility of such

amendments with human rights legislation. We now need to determine the Committee's view on those amendments.

The Committee Clerk: As members will recall, the Human Rights Commission advised that amendments B (i), B(ii) and B(iii) would exempt some Traveller sites from the protections of the Bill and that that would not be compatible with human rights legislation. Therefore, were the Committee to support such amendments, we would get into all sorts of trouble later on. Such amendments might be ruled out of order by the Speaker, and the Bill might no longer be competent. Therefore, the Chairperson will ask the Committee to confirm that it wants to step back from pursuing those amendments.

The Chairperson: We know that the answer to the question is that we do not intend to support those amendments. Are members happy with that?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson: The Department has proposed a counter-amendment, the text of which is in the table. Do you have anything to say, Stephen?

Mr Martin: The arguments for the counter-amendment have been well rehearsed.

The Chairperson: We have heard the evidence.

Question proposed:

That the Committee recommend to the Assembly that the clause be amended as follows: In page 1, line 8, leave out "3" and insert "12". — [The Department for Social Development]

Question put and agreed to.

The Chairperson: Amendment B (iv) was proposed by stakeholders who support the exemption of Travellers' sites from the Bill. That would change Northern Ireland law to give the Housing Executive and district councils additional powers to provide Travellers' caravan sites.

Mr Martin: That amendment is not required. Prior to 2003, the Housing Executive and district councils had that responsibility. It was transferred in the Housing (Northern Ireland) Order 2003, which inserted section 28A into the Housing (Northern Ireland) Order 1981 to give that responsibility to the Housing Executive. Therefore, the amendment is unnecessary.

The Chairperson: Are members content not to support that amendment?

Members indicated assent.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, subject to the Department's proposed amendment, put and agreed to.

Clause 1, subject to the Department's proposed amendment, agreed to.

Clause 2 (Particulars of agreements)

The Chairperson: Clause 2 requires caravan site owners to provide eligible caravan owner-occupiers — those on protected sites — with a written statement of their residential agreement. The Committee previously agreed that it did not support amendments C and D. Are we content to hold that position?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson: We move to amendment E. The Committee agreed that the Department should frame an amendment that introduces a requirement for a statutory review of the effectiveness of residential agreements. At the Committee's request, the Department has drafted such an amendment to clause 4. Stephen, do you want to explain that?

Mr Martin: The last time that we discussed that, the Department made it clear that that amendment was not needed because the Department will undertake the review as a matter of course. However, there is an example in the Wildlife Bill, which is going through the Assembly, of a review clause, and our proposal is based on that clause. It will place a duty on the Department to conduct a review, within the first five years of the Bill's coming into operation, of the schedule and the elements of Part 1 that apply to the residential caravan sector, for which we will be responsible. Thereafter, we will review at least every five years, because clause 4 gives us the power to amend the schedule and Part 1 through subordinate legislation, subject to draft affirmative resolution. The review will be used to determine whether the Department should exercise those powers, and it will place a duty on us to review.

When we discussed the matter previously, the issue was what would happen in the event of a court case. The clause 4 power is primarily to allow us to keep the law up to date as case law as the courts make decisions about the legislation. The question was asked that, if we set particular

review periods, what would happen should we need to do something earlier. This gives us flexibility so that, if there is a big case in three years' time, we could review it at the time without having to wait for five years. In our view, it is a balanced amendment that demonstrates the Department's good faith and gives the Committee some of the reassurances that it needs. However, we will review as a matter of course with or without the amendment.

The Chairperson: Amendment E is to clause 4 rather than to clause 2. I have jumped ahead. We will bank that explanation and come back to it at a later stage.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, put and agreed to.

Clause 2 agreed to.

Clause 3 (Terms of agreements)

The Chairperson: Clause 3 refers to residential agreements. The Housing Executive, through amendment F, sought clarification that emergency halting and transit sites would be entirely exempt from the residential agreement protections. Failing that, it wanted always to be able to recover a part of one of those sites without having to demonstrate that the caravan owner-occupier had failed to comply with specific tenancy conditions in the Bill.

The Department obtained advice from the Human Rights Commission, and the Committee received independent legal advice on the compatibility of such an amendment with human rights legislation. The Department's amendment to clause 1 was proposed as an alternative to the exemption sought in amendment F, and we discussed that at length. Stephen, I am sure that you have nothing to add.

Mr Martin: No, nothing.

The Chairperson: Are members content not to agree to amendment F?

Members indicated assent.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, put and agreed to.

Clause 3 agreed to.

Clause 4 (Power to amend implied terms)

The Chairperson: Clause 4 allows the Department to amend residential agreements by regulations

that would come before the Assembly. At the Committee's request, the Department drafted an amendment that would require statutory review of the effectiveness of residential agreements.

Question proposed:

That the Committee recommend to the Assembly that the clause be amended as follows. In page 3, line 42, at end insert:

"(6) The Department for Social Development shall—

(a) not later than 5 years after the coming into operation of this Act, and

(b) at least once in every period of 5 years thereafter,

review Parts 1 and 2 of the Schedule and determine whether it should exercise the power to make an order under this section". — [The Committee for Social Development.]

The Chairperson: As Stephen explained that to us earlier, we need not revisit it, unless members have any questions or issues.

The Committee Clerk: The review, and maybe the Department will confirm this, would refer only to the residential agreements in Part 1. Therefore, as the amendment is currently drafted, it would not be a review of the legislation for the seasonal sites. It would be the legislation that applies only to the residential sites.

Mr Martin: That is absolutely right.

Question put and agreed to.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, subject to the Committee's proposed amendment, put and agreed to.

Clause 4, subject to the Committee's proposed amendment, agreed to.

Clause 5 (Successors in title)

The Chairperson: Clause 5 applies only to caravan owner-occupiers who live in a caravan as their main or sole residence and who rent a pitch on a so-called protected site. Clause 5 allows those owner-occupiers to leave their caravan and the tenancy of the pitch to anyone when they die, whether the inheritor lives in the caravan or not. The Committee agreed that it did not support amendment H. Are we still content to hold that position?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson: Amendment I would specifically prevent users of Housing Executive Traveller sites from leaving the tenancy of their pitch to anyone else following their death, regardless of the duration of a stay at such a site. Again, following advice from the Human Rights Commission, the Department produced a counter-amendment that would allow the Housing Executive structured discretion in the application of the clause; for example, the inheritor would be obliged to be resident.

Mr Martin: We tried to find a middle way. The key issue for the Housing Executive was that it was concerned that there would be empty pitches in certain circumstances, and yet there was an obvious need for them. The amendment removes the exemption from the successor to be able to reside on the site. Therefore, if, on a Traveller site, the successor is a Traveller and is prepared to live there, he or she would be obliged to do so, unless he or she decided to sell or gift. It means that the pitch does not remain empty and can be used by a Traveller.

In drafting the amendment, we discovered an anomaly in the more general situation, whereby the only option for a non-resident successor on a normal park homes site was to sell the caravan and assign the agreement. They could not gift it to another family member. That seemed to be a highly anomalous situation, so we addressed that on the park homes site and the Traveller site.

For a Traveller in those circumstances to be able to live there or sell or gift the caravan, he or she will have to get the Housing Executive's approval for assigning the agreement. A park homes resident will be able to sell or gift the caravan, and, in both circumstances, the site owner will have some control over the assignment of the agreement. That seemed a reasonable step.

Mr Easton: I have one wee query. There was a 10% commission charge for someone selling a caravan. If the caravan were left to a loved one, would the site owner get a wee cut somewhere along the line?

Mr Martin: No. The provision in the schedule is clear that no commission is payable on gifting.

Mr Easton: Happy days.

The Chairperson: Is commission payable when someone inherits the caravan?

Mr Martin: No. Commission is payable only when the caravan is sold to another party who is not a qualifying family member. There is no commission on gifting.

Mr Easton: Mickey and I would not have been too happy about that.

Mr F McCann: You are getting to the age at which you have to be concerned about it.
[Laughter.]

The Chairperson: Anyone would think that they had a caravan together. [Laughter.]

Mr Brady: It is a motorhome. [Laughter.]

Ms Lo: Stephen, the 10% commission does not apply to Housing Executive sites anyway.

Mr Martin: That is an amendment that we have tabled.

The Chairperson: We have heard evidence and received legal advice about the compatibility of amendment I.

Are members content not to agree to amendment I?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson: The Department's counter-amendment restricts the application of the successors in title provision in respect of access to pitches for Travellers' sites as Stephen explained.

Question proposed:

That the Committee recommend to the Assembly that the clause be amended as follows. In page 4, line 7, leave out subsections (3) to (5) and insert:

"(3) The following subsections apply where a person entitled to the benefit of and bound by a residential agreement dies at a time when that person is occupying the caravan as that person's only or main residence; and in those subsections—

(a) that person is referred to as 'the deceased';

(b) references to 'the beneficiary' of the deceased are to the person entitled to the caravan by virtue of the deceased's will or under the law relating to intestacy;

(c) references to 'a travellers' site' are to a caravan site provided and managed by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive under Article 28A of the Housing (Northern Ireland) Order 1981 (caravan sites for members of Irish Traveller community); and

(d) a beneficiary of the deceased is a qualifying person if the beneficiary satisfies the Housing Executive that the beneficiary—

(i) is a member of the Irish Traveller community (within the meaning of Article 5 of the Race Relations (Northern Ireland) Order 1997); and

(ii) intends to occupy the caravan as the beneficiary's only or main residence.

(4) The agreement has effect for the benefit of and is binding on any person residing with the deceased at the time of death who is—

(a) the surviving spouse or civil partner of the deceased; or

(b) if there is no surviving spouse or civil partner so residing, a member of the deceased's family.

(5) If—

(a) there is no person falling within subsection (4); and

(b) the agreement relates to a caravan on a caravan site other than a travellers' site, the agreement has effect for the benefit of and is binding on the beneficiary of the deceased, but subject to subsection (7).

(6) If—

(a) there is no person falling within subsection (4);

(b) the agreement relates to a caravan on a travellers' site, and

(c) the beneficiary of the deceased is a qualifying person, the agreement has effect for the benefit of and is binding on the beneficiary of the deceased.

(7) A residential agreement does not have effect for the benefit of or bind a person by virtue of subsection (5) in so far as—

(a) it would, but for this subsection, enable or require that person to occupy the caravan; or

(b) it includes terms implied by virtue of paragraph 5 of Part 1 of the Schedule.

(8) In relation to a residential agreement—

(a) any reference in this Part to the owner includes a reference to any person who is bound by and entitled to the benefit of the agreement by virtue of subsection (1); and

(b) subject to subsection (7), any reference in this Part to the occupier includes a reference to any person who is entitled to the benefit of and bound by the agreement by virtue of any of subsections (2) to (6).” — [The Department for Social Development.]

The Chairperson: It is a fairly lengthy amendment, but, given the explanation that we have had, I think that we will be happy to support it.

Question put and agreed to.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, subject to the Department's proposed amendments, put and agreed to.

Clause 5, subject to the Department's proposed amendment, agreed to.

Clause 6 (Jurisdiction)

The Chairperson: This clause gives the County Court jurisdiction in hearing disputes relating to residential agreements. The Committee previously agreed that it would not support amendment J, which would pass jurisdiction on disputes to a body such as the residential property tribunal.

Are members content not to agree to amendment No J?

Members indicated assent.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, put and agreed to.

Clause 6 agreed to.

Clause 7 (Application of this Part)

The Chairperson: Clause 7 is in Part 2 of the Bill, which refers to users of seasonal sites. We are off on holiday now, as this is a different part of the Bill.

Ms Lo: Happy days.

The Chairperson: These sites are available only for a limited period of the year. Thus, users cannot live in their caravans as their only or main residence. The Bill gives those caravan owner-occupiers the right to written statements of their terms and conditions. The Committee agreed that, although it did not support amendment K, it wished to ensure that seasonal users on protected sites receive the same protection as seasonal users on seasonal sites.

At the Committee's request, the Department drafted an amendment. Stephen, will you speak to that?

Mr Martin: I will try to keep this simple. The Bill as drafted makes a distinction between protected sites — the assumption is that all protected sites are residential — and seasonal sites. Stakeholders identified a group of people in the middle who were using protected sites for holiday usage. That was largely because

some of the site licences are quite old and a bit vague. We have removed that distinction, so there are protected sites to which Part 1 will apply, and all other sites will enjoy the Part 2 protections. We have slightly amended the wording and changed the definition of seasonal sites, so there will be protected sites, and all other caravan sites will be protected by Part 2.

The Chairperson: Are there any other questions on that?

Mr F McCann: I might be completely confused, but when we discussed tenancy agreements, a point was raised about the legality of a residents' association and whether it would be recognised by the site owner.

The Chairperson: That is a distinct amendment, and we will come to that later.

Mr F McCann: OK.

The Chairperson: Members appear to have no further questions.

Question proposed:

That the Committee recommend to the Assembly that the clause be amended as follows: In page 5, line 5, leave out from "under" to end of line 7 and insert "—

"(a) under which a person is entitled to station a caravan on land forming part of a caravan site and occupy the caravan for a period exceeding 28 days; and

(b) which is not a residential agreement within the meaning of Part 1." — [The Department for Social Development.]

Question put and agreed to.

Question proposed:

That the Committee recommend to the Assembly that the clause be amended as follows: In page 5, leave out lines 10 to 15. — [The Department for Social Development.]

Question put and agreed to.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, subject to the Department's proposed amendments, put and agreed to.

Clause 7, subject to the Department's proposed amendments, agreed to.

Clause 8 (Particulars of agreements)

The Chairperson: Clause 8 requires seasonal caravan site owners to provide written statements to caravan owner-occupiers of relevant terms and conditions. This is a Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) policy area, and it argued that clause 8 will prevent site owners from enforcing unwritten terms and that existing consumer legislation will protect from other unreasonable contract terms.

Amendment L was proposed by the Committee and drafted by the Department, and it is designed to give seasonal caravan users on protected sites the same protections as seasonal caravan users on seasonal sites. The amendment is linked to clause 7.

Questions proposed:

That the Committee recommend to the Assembly that the clause be amended as follows: In page 5, line 19, leave out "seasonal" and insert "caravan". — [The Committee for Social Development.]

In page 5, line 33, leave out "seasonal" and insert "caravan". — [The Committee for Social Development.]

In page 6, line 1, leave out "seasonal" and insert "caravan". — [The Committee for Social Development.]

Mr F McCann: For how long does that run? Does it apply for the length of time that a person is on the site, or is the site owner able to review it periodically?

Mr Martin: The written statement is for the duration.

Questions put and agreed to.

The Committee previously agreed that it would not support amendments M and O. Are members content to maintain that position?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson: Amendment N is Mr McCallister's amendment, which requires the owner of a seasonal site to consult a qualifying residents' association on the running of the site. The site owner would not be obliged to take into account the representations of the qualifying residents' association. That measure is not in place in Great Britain.

The Committee will recall the response from the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment, which supported the principle of consultation with residents' groups in that sector, but neither agreed nor disagreed in respect of the amendment. The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment opposed the amendment, and members have a copy of her letter. We have not discussed or taken a position on that amendment. Do members want to gauge where we stand before proceeding in a particular direction?

Ms Lo: Why is the Minister opposed to the amendment?

The Chairperson: I do not propose to speak for anybody, but I do not think that her opposition is to the principle behind the amendment, which is that, if there is a residents' association on the site, there should be consultation. However, there is an issue about enforcing that and what regime could be put in place.

The suggested amendment refers to consulting, but not taking into account the representations. The issue of enforcement is who enforces, how they enforce and what can be done when a site owner does not consult. The argument could be made that it could result in a bureaucratic mess but offer very little benefit.

Mr F McCann: Many seasonal holiday parks have unique communities, and they regard themselves as such. Although they remain individual owners of caravans, quite a lot of issues arise that affect the whole site. The recognition of the formation of a tenants' or residents' association on that site is beneficial not only to the caravan owners, but to the park owners, because it allows them to enter into a debate about any major changes, or even minor changes, that may affect those on the site.

The Chairperson: Perhaps the Department can confirm this, but there is nothing at all to prevent residents on a site from forming a group.

Mr F McCann: Are they recognised by the park owners, or are they simply a group of individuals?

Mr Martin: As the Bill stands, there would be no formal requirement for the park owner to recognise a residential group. However, there is nothing to prevent one from being established.

Mr F McCann: However, the owner could simply ignore the residents' association.

The Chairperson: The proposed amendment, and the Committee Clerk may be able to help me with this, does not state that the owner is obliged to do whatever is agreed anyway. Therefore, a residents' association could be set up and the site owner could be required to consult it. However, my understanding is that the proposed amendment does not state that the site owner must take any heed of what is said anyway. This might sound pejorative, but it is almost a sham consultation process.

Mr F McCann: Initially, I raised the matter because I believed that it did not go far enough in giving recognition to people on the site. The issue is how to fit in that recognition.

The recognition of a residents' association is beneficial to both sides. If there were negotiations between one group that represents hundreds of people on a site, the site owner would have to take on board the large number of people represented by the association, rather than individuals. I do not know how that could be phrased. That is probably a bit more than John is seeking.

The Chairperson: The proposed amendment does not do what you described. I would argue that it is weak; it does not do anything. If you were to go as far as suggesting that that makes life difficult for a site owner to operate his business —

Mr F McCann: I am trying to achieve a happy medium. We have spoken throughout this process about the abuses of people on the sites.

The Chairperson: Those sorts of abuses are precisely what the written agreement targets and will outlaw.

Ms Ní Chuilín: The principle is that one tenants' association is like any other. No body or agency is compelled to do anything that is asked of it. Surely, it is simply a matter of recognising that relationship. Those agreements have to be tracked, tested and discussed, and, without that recognition, the ability simply to walk away and do nothing will always remain.

Mrs M Bradley: I can accept all the recommendations being made around the table. However, is there a solid case in the Bill that the rights of caravan owners are totally protected? Would it not be a foolish site owner who knew about the law but still caused problems for someone? The site owner would recognise the people who wanted

to come to talk to him or her about certain issues. That is what we are talking about.

The Chairperson: Are you content not to amend the clause?

Mrs M Bradley: Yes, if the law is strong enough to protect people's rights. I just want to be sure about that.

The Chairperson: One can never completely ensure that nothing that is negative will happen. Effectively, the sponsor of the Bill, with the assistance of the Department, is trying to ensure that some of the bad practices that were commonplace will disappear.

Mrs M Bradley: No one can stop a group of people on a site setting up a small group.

The Chairperson: The Department confirmed that there is nothing to stop that.

Mr Craig: We all share the same concern. If a site owner suddenly decides to change the terms and conditions and increases the rates, what is he or she required to do should we pass the legislation as it stands?

Mr Martin: I am afraid that that part of the Bill relates to a Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment area of policy in which I do not have a great deal of expertise. I remember that the Trading Standards advice to the Committee some months ago was, essentially, that consumer protection law on unfair contracts already exists. The difficulty is in its enforcement, because when cases come to court, there is often no documented agreement. The Bill will put in place the requirement for a documented agreement in which express terms will be set out, and it gives teeth to the existing consumer protection law. That is my understanding.

Mr Craig: Stephen, if a site owner changes that agreement, does he then have to consult with all the owners, not only a residents' group? I have a distinct worry, because I have seen the abuse of that system in other circles. Half a dozen owners can set up a residents' group, but they might be in the pocket of the owner and simply nod in agreement with anything that he says, with the result that everybody is left looking stupid. Is the site owner forced to communicate changes not only to a limited number of individuals but to everybody on the site?

Mr Martin: I can only explain my understanding of the Bill, and it might be limited in that part.

The written statement must include the express terms, which are the specifics, such as when site fees will be increased, and so forth. If a term is not included in the written statement as an expressed term, it is unenforceable by the owner.

Clause 8(7) allows for the agreement to be varied by agreement between the two parties. If it is varied, however, it remains subject to the same requirements. Anything that is not included in the express terms is unenforceable. Even if something is included in the express terms, but would constitute an unfair contract term, it might not be enforceable. There are protections, but I am no expert on that part of the legislation, and that is my understanding of the evidence from Trading Standards to the Committee. I am afraid that that is as about as far as I can go.

Mr Craig: A greater worry is that a site owner could issue individual contracts, as opposed to a universal contract. Is that the case?

The Chairperson: Do you mean different contracts with individual tenants?

Mr Craig: Is it possible for one contract to state that one individual must pay £2,000 a year for rent while the guy next door pays £10,000?

Mr Martin: They are individual agreements.

The Chairperson: The essence of the matter is that there are individual agreements. We always dwell on the bad practices, but a good site with no issues will still have differential fees depending on whether somebody has a sea view or looks on to a main road. That will always be the case, and that might be set out in an existing contract. That individualisation is always there. The Committee Clerk reminds me that the purpose of the Bill is to ensure that the amount that each and every individual expects to pay is expressly written down.

Ms Ní Chuilín: Are those agreements legally binding?

The Chairperson: Yes.

Ms Ní Chuilín: Therefore, regardless of the fact that they are individual agreements, they are legally binding, and everybody knows where they sit. If the amendment is weaker, I do not understand how what Fra proposes would make it impossible for owners to operate the sites.

The Chairperson: I am simply putting forward a position —

Ms Ní Chuilín: I know that you are acting as devil's advocate, but I am not clear on that point.

The Chairperson: I will use a slightly ridiculous example to illustrate the matter. Site owners could make a pertinent point about whom they had to consult and what process was in place for that group, in turn, to consult its members. Somebody might want to put a flower bed beside a caravan, but that is a silly example. If someone wanted to do something that significantly enhanced a site, or if emergency work were necessary, would he or she have to consult the residents' group while a sewerage, water or gas problem developed? The suggested amendment would require the site owner to consult a qualified residents' association on the running of the site. Where is that line drawn? It could enter the realm of the ridiculous.

Ms Ní Chuilín: The amendment is weak, because it could relate to flower beds and issues such as running the site. If the amendment is meant to refer explicitly to fees, terms and conditions, it should state that. I imagine that on most sites, even those that are poorly run, there are different levels of communications, but there is still communication. The amendment is simply too vague. It could mean all things to all people and is open to a greater level of abuse. That is my concern. However, if it aims to strengthen the rights of long-term tenants, it should state that and spell out how that would be achieved.

Ms Lo: It looks like the only enforceable elements would be written in the agreement. Surely, the detail of the operation or management must be included in that agreement. That would provide a safeguard against sudden changes to operation or management. The consultation of residents' groups should be promoted as good practice rather than being part of the law.

The Chairperson: Do people who go to a seasonal site for a holiday for a few weekends a year do so with the intention of a setting-up of a residents' association?

Mr F McCann: Some people go for six weeks in the summer and spend every holiday there.

The Chairperson: I know that a site is run as a village in many respects. For the vast majority of

people, however, the setting-up of a residents' association is not their first thought.

Mr F McCann: I appreciate that, but major decisions are being made —

The Chairperson: It is a holiday for political activists.

Mr F McCann: A flower bed is not the kind of issue with which residents' associations would deal, because that would simply involve individuals asking permission of a site owner. There are bigger issues, such as those that Carál mentioned. Everything that is written down is open to interpretation anyway. When the representatives from DETI gave evidence, they said that very few people were taken to court for infringements because it is almost not worth the effort of doing so. We should be trying to strengthen the legislation to allow, for the first time, people in the seasonal sector to have a say and, particularly, as Alex argued, to give a voice to people who are resident in the sites all year. That would give some teeth to people on the sites.

Stephen referred to clause 8(7), which is gobbledegook to me. Both sides would need six or seven lawyers to get to the bottom of it. Simplification is required so that people can understand what their rights are. Written agreements are open to various interpretations. If someone were to have a major difficulty or problem with a written agreement and the site owner disagreed, it would surely be better to negotiate before incurring the expense of going to court. A residents' association that is recognised on the site could be where such negotiation takes place with the local caravan site owners.

Mr Easton: I can see everyone's point of view.

Mr F McCann: You are definitely a politician.

The Chairperson: Set up a residents' group.

Mr Easton: The Chairperson said that a whole pile of silly issues might end up with a residents' association, and those issues could be detrimental to the running of a caravan park. Equally, the more important issues that Fra mentioned would be covered in the agreement anyway. I have no major issue with the establishment of a residents' group, but the amendment is weak. The only people who will set up a residents' group will be the permanent residents; not people who stay for six weeks a year.

The Chairperson: It is in the interest of those folk to do so, given their experience.

Mr Easton: They can do it anyway.

The Chairperson: They live in an area in the same way as social housing tenants or owner occupiers, so they have the right to do that.

Mr Brady: The group would be a conduit between residents and the owner. However, if individual contracts are legally enforceable, as with contracts of employment, I presume that each individual who signed a mutual contract would have legal redress to challenge a change to its terms and conditions. I agree with Carál's point that there are residents' associations everywhere. A residents' group will try to negotiate and sort out any issues.

Mr Craig: It is a lobbying group.

Mr Brady: If there is stalemate between an individual and the owner, however, that group is not necessarily able to progress the matter any further. It is important that people have the protection of legal redress. I am in favour of residents' groups in circumstances in which people feel that it they are applicable. However, they are a negotiating tool rather than one of enforcement.

The Chairperson: That is the point that I was making earlier. In the letter from the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, she also makes that point.

Mr Brady: I do not want to agree with the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment that much. *[Laughter.]*

The Chairperson: I thought that you thought that she is a lovely girl. Having taken soundings from her officials, she made the point about the way —

Mr Brady: If Alex and I go on holiday in a caravan together, he might be able to convince me.

Ms Ní Chuilín: Perish the thought.

The Chairperson: For a game of chess.

Mr F McCann: Groomsport: here we come.

The Chairperson: Alex is sweating now.

Mr Brady: We will gloss over that one.

The Chairperson: The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment made a point about

enforceability; but what happens if someone does not consult about a flower bed?

Ms Ní Chuilín: That is a moot point. It does not matter what form the residents' association takes. In principle, the owner, boss or employer does not have to implement anything. For that reason, the amendment weakens the Bill because it is too vague.

Mr Craig: It is too vague.

Ms Ní Chuilín: The rights of tenants should have been made more implicit. An opportunity has been missed.

The Chairperson: Tenants have those rights anyway.

Mr Brady: It is a bit like when unions negotiate with employers. If there is no redress or no solution is reached, the person ends up at an industrial tribunal, which is the same as going to court. It is the same principle. People try to sort out the problem first, and if they cannot, inevitably they have to —

The Chairperson: A situation in which a residents' association always comes up against the site owner indicates a more fundamental problem on the site that may run counter to some of the individual agreements anyway. Individual agreements are as likely to catch those problems as residents' associations.

Mrs M Bradley: People who go to sites for the season or during the children's holidays will not want to set up residents' groups. We are having the discussion, but we do not even know whether caravan owners who live on permanent sites would want to bother with a residents' group if they knew that the Bill gave them proper cover. We are grasping at straws.

The Committee Clerk: Qualifying residents' associations are built into the Bill. Members will recall that two ladies from Seahaven gave evidence to the Committee in June and stated that they would be involved.

The Chairperson: There is a distinct difference. I assume that we are not supportive of proposed amendment N.

Sorry for the delay; the Committee Clerk and I were discussing our next caravan holiday.

Mr F McCann: Will it be a foursome?

Mr Craig: It sounds as though it would be easier to buy a tourer.

The Chairperson: I am thinking about how to handle this issue, because different views have been expressed. Some people are completely opposed; while others think that the clause is not strong enough. I know what my view is, and I think that I detect the views of others. However, I have to keep the process right. Is it appropriate that the Committee Clerk takes the —

Ms Ní Chuilín: Will we park this one?

The Chairperson: Will we park it and come back with something else?

Ms Ní Chuilín: Yes.

The Chairperson: We do not want to prejudice anybody's position, although folks have expressed their view. If somebody has expressed the view that a clause does not do one thing and that they would like it to do something else, it is only right that we look at a corresponding amendment and, subsequently, take a firm view either way.

Mr F McCann: There has been a difference of opinion about the way in which we should go about it, but there is general agreement that we are trying to strengthen the rights of people on the sites.

The Chairperson: Ultimately, the conclusion may be that we are happy with the legislation, as amended.

Ms Ní Chuilín: Will we wait to see the words of the proposed amendment?

The Chairperson: I will look at an option or two.

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am happy with that.

The Chairperson: That does not prejudice anybody's position or box us in.

Ms Lo: Is it OK to say that site owners will be "encouraged" to consult as good practice?

The Chairperson: A range of options is available.

Clause 8 referred for further consideration.

Clause 9 (Application of this Part)

The Chairperson: We move on now to Part 3. Clause 9 includes the provisions that protect residential occupiers on protected sites from eviction and harassment. No amendments have

been proposed, and there is nothing further from the Department.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, put and agreed to.

Clause 9 agreed to.

Clause 10 (Protection of occupiers against eviction and harassment)

The Chairperson: Clause 10 relates to the protection of those living on residential or protected sites from eviction and harassment. Amendment P, as proposed by the Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA), would give councils the powers to investigate and prosecute complaints related to eviction and harassment.

Question proposed:

That the Committee recommend to the Assembly that the clause be amended as follows: In page 7, line 43, at end insert

"(12) Proceedings for an offence under this section may be instituted by the district council in whose district the site is situated." — [The Department for Social Development.]

Mr Martin: We are happy to facilitate NILGA's wishes on this. It brings the powers broadly into line with their existing powers in the private rented sector, so it makes sense.

Question put and agreed to.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, subject to the Department's proposed amendment, put and agreed to.

Clause 10, subject to the Department's proposed amendment, agreed to.

Clause 11 (Provision for suspension of eviction orders)

The Chairperson: Clause 11 allows the courts to suspend eviction orders for the residential sector for up to one year. No amendments have been proposed.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, put and agreed to.

Clause 11 agreed to.

Clause 12 (Supplementary)

The Chairperson: Clause 12 states that the county courts have jurisdiction in respect of disputes in the residential sector. No amendments were proposed, and we have not received anything from the Department.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, put and agreed to.

Clause 12 agreed to.

Clause 13 (Meaning of “caravan” in this Act)

The Chairperson: Clause 13 refers to the meaning of a caravan.

Ms Ní Chullín: We get to the meaning only in clause 13. That should be in clause 1.
[Laughter.]

The Chairperson: The meaning of caravans is an existential question, perhaps one for a philosophy student. [Laughter.] Clause 13 brings the legal definition into line with that in England and Wales. The Environment Committee considered that clause and proposed no amendments.

Mr Easton: I raised this issue last week. The definition will now be similar to that in England and Wales. Are park homes included?

Mr Martin: Yes, twin units are included.

Mr Easton: OK. At Seahaven, the situation is that a caravan owner pays a certain annual rate, but a park home owner, even though a park home has a caravan chassis and is a caravan, pays more. If the definition is changed, will park homes be classified as caravans?

Mr Martin: That is a matter for rates legislation. The definition will apply only to the Bill and the Caravans Act 1963. The definition of a caravan in other legislation will not be affected by Part 4.

The Chairperson: The status quo will remain.

Ms Lo: Is a motorhome totally different from a caravan?

The Chairperson: It is just a car or vehicle.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, put and agreed to.

Clause 13 agreed to.

Clause 14 (Definition of “caravan” in Caravans Act)

The Chairperson: Clause 14 applies a new definition of a caravan to existing legislation. The Environment Committee considered the clause and proposed no amendments.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, put and agreed to.

Clause 14 agreed to.

Clause 15 (Interpretation)

The Chairperson: Clause 15 is in Part 5 and defines terms that are used in the Bill such as “residential agreement”, “occupier”, and so on. Previously, the Committee agreed that it did not support the National Caravan Council’s proposed amendment, amendment Q, which would define protected sites as those not including Travellers’ sites. Are we happy to maintain that position?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson: Amendment R was proposed by the Committee and drafted by the Department. It is designed to give seasonal caravan users on protected sites the same protections as those of seasonal caravan users on seasonal sites. The amendment is linked to clauses 7 and 8.

Questions proposed:

That the Committee recommend to the Assembly that the clause be amended as follows: In page 10, line 26, leave out,

“protected site or a seasonal site”

and insert “caravan site”. — [The Department for Social Development.]

In page 10, line 32, leave out “seasonal site” and insert

“site in respect of which the relevant planning permission of site licence—

is expressed to be granted for holiday use only; or

is otherwise so expressed or subject to such conditions that there are times of the year when no caravan may be stationed on the land for human habitation;”. — [The Department for Social Development.]

In page 10, leave out line 36. — [The Department for Social Development.]

Mr Martin: They are, in fact, a series of linked amendments that are consequential to the amendments to clauses 7 and 8.

Questions put and agreed to.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, subject to the Department's proposed amendments, put and agreed to.

Clause 15, subject to the Department's proposed amendments, agreed to.

Clause 16 (Commencement)

The Chairperson: Clause 16 commences the provisions of the Bill six months after Royal Assent. The Committee has already stated that it does not support early or late commencement of the Bill's provisions.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, put and agreed to.

Clause 16 agreed to.

Clause 17 agreed to.

Schedule (Part 1: Terms implied by section 3)

The Chairperson: Part 1 of the schedule sets out the terms of the residential agreement. Those apply only to caravan owner-occupiers who live in a caravan as their main or sole residence and who rent a pitch on a so-called protected site. The terms include: methods of termination for the contract; re-siting for emergency works; pitch fee controls; owner and occupier obligations; and conditions for setting up and consulting a qualifying residents' association. The Committee previously agreed that it did not support amendments S and T, which relate to the commission that is charged on sales. Are members happy enough with that?

Members indicated assent.

Question proposed:

That the Committee recommend to the Assembly that the clause be amended as follows: In schedule 1, page 14, line 11, leave out "the rate of 10" and insert

*"a rate not exceeding 10% of the sale price". —
[The Department for Social Development.]*

The Chairperson: Information from the British Holiday and Home Parks Association and the Assembly's Research Services has been

provided on typical caravan sale prices for park homes and smaller caravans. The Department has proposed a drafting amendment, amendment U, which clarifies the policy intention that commission should be no more than 10%. Was that a drafting error, Stephen?

Mr Martin: It was an oversight.

Question put and agreed to.

Question proposed:

That the Committee recommend to the Assembly that the clause be amended as follows:

In page 14, line 15, at end insert—

"(11) In relation to a caravan on a travellers' site (within the meaning given by section 5(3)(c), this paragraph applies with the omission of—

sub-paragraph (9); and

in paragraph (10), the words 'Except to the extent mentioned in sub-paragraph (9),' — [The Department for Social Development.]

The Chairperson: Amendment V is a departmental amendment that clarifies the policy intention of the Bill. The Bill was not designed to produce a situation in which Travellers who stay on a Housing Executive service site are charged commission when they sell their caravans. The amendment, therefore, removes the requirement for Travellers on service sites to pay commission to the Housing Executive. Do you have anything to add, Stephen?

Mr Martin: It is a fairly simple amendment that gives effect to exactly what you described, Chairperson.

Question put and agreed to.

The Chairperson: The Committee agreed to consider amendment W, which would require levels of commission to be set out in residential agreements. The Department advises that the proposed amendment undermines other aspects of the Bill in respect of express terms and implied terms as set out in the schedule. Stephen, do you want to elaborate a wee bit on that?

Mr Martin: I will try to keep it simple. The schedule sets out the implied terms. We were talking earlier about the seasonal sector. There is commonality in the residential sector because Part 1 of the schedule will apply to all residential agreements. It is suggested that if

commission is agreed at a lesser level, it should be cited in the agreement. That creates what is called an express term. Clause 3 sets out that an express term cannot override an implied term. By trying to do that, we would make the Bill work against itself, because the key principle is that the schedule sets out the implied terms that will apply, no matter what. However, there could be an express term that runs against it.

There is also a further difficulty. As members mentioned, there have been some concerns about the level of commission. In future, the Government could decide that the commission level should come down. If, in five years' time, there is a review and the Government decide to reduce the commission level to 7.5%, but an express term in a number of agreements states that it should be 8.5%, that will cause difficulty. To prevent eroding the key principle of the Bill, which is that an express term cannot override an implied term, and to prevent further problems down the line, the amendment is not workable.

The Chairperson: Are members happy enough with that explanation and not to pursue the amendment?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson: The Committee previously agreed that it did not support amendments X, Y, Z and AA. In respect of amendment AA, members may wish to consider the response from Trading Standards on the rights and responsibilities of caravan users and site owners in respect of caravan removal. It sets out that unreasonable costs of removal, and so on, are likely to be deemed unfair and could be the subject of criminal proceedings. We raised some issues about that previously. Are members happy to maintain that position?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson: In amendment BB, the Housing Executive sought exemptions from the gifting provisions of the Bill for Housing Executive Traveller sites on the basis of the acute need to provide pitches for Travellers who pursue a nomadic lifestyle. The Department suggests that such an exemption would not be compatible with human rights legislation and that the controls in the Caravans Bill that allow gifting permission to be withheld in certain circumstances are sufficient.

Mr Martin: That summarises the amendment extremely well.

The Chairperson: Are members content not to agree to amendment BB?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson: We move on to amendment CC.

Question proposed:

That the Committee recommend to the Assembly that Part 1 of the schedule be amended as follows: In page 15, line 5, at end insert

“or to any amenities on the site” — [The Department for Social Development.]

The Chairperson: In respect of amendment CC, the Housing Executive also sought to specify, for example, the refurbishment of amenity blocks as essential or emergency works.

Mr Martin: The only point worth noting is that it would apply to all residential sites.

The Chairperson: Park homes as well.

Mr Martin: A court would have to deem it to be reasonable, so the site owner would have to do quite a lot of work to justify the request.

Question put and agreed to.

The Chairperson: The next amendment is DD.

Question proposed:

That the Committee recommend to the Assembly that Part 1 of the schedule be amended as follows: In page 14, line 30, leave out

“the protected site” and insert “any protected site of the owner”. — [The Department for Social Development.]

The Chairperson: As regards amendment DD, the Housing Executive sought to have the authority to require Travellers to relocate to other sites during essential or emergency works.

Mr Martin: Again, that will apply across the piece. Therefore, if a site owner in the park home sector had more than one site, he could apply to the court for a period to re-site a caravan, if it were reasonable to do so, to that other park during emergency works, and so on. That is unlikely, because the only organisation that will meet that requirement will be the Housing Executive, but, if the market expands,

there may be a situation in which it is called for in another sector.

Mr F McCann: You said that it may never be used or come into being, but, if it did, would the person who is being moved from one site to another have the right to move back again when the work is completed?

Mr Martin: Yes, absolutely. That is already enshrined in the Bill.

Ms Lo: Does your use of “reasonable” cover distance?

Mr Martin: Yes. A site owner would have to demonstrate to a court that it would be reasonable. It is unlikely that a court would find it reasonable to move someone from, for example, Downpatrick to Strabane. That would be unreasonable. However, were it reasonable for a particular period and for a clear purpose, that would be OK.

Ms Lo: Who will cover the costs?

Mr Martin: As set out in the Bill, the site owner must cover the cost of relocation.

Question put and agreed to.

Question, That the Committee is content with Part 1 of the schedule, subject to the Department's proposed amendments, put and agreed to.

Part 1 of the schedule, subject to the Department's proposed amendments, agreed to.

Schedule (Part 2: Matters concerning which terms may be implied by court)

The Chairperson: Part 2 of the schedule sets out the terms that may be applied by the court in respect of a residential agreement, including sums payable by the occupier in pursuance of the residential agreement, the yearly review of pitch fees, the improvement of facilities on the site and the preservation of the amenity. No amendments have been proposed.

Question, That the Committee is content with Part 2 of the schedule, put and agreed to.

Part 2 of the schedule agreed to.

Schedule (Part 3: Supplementary provisions)

The Chairperson: Part 3 of the schedule refers to the sale of a caravan on a protected site. This part of the schedule sets out a duty to

forward requests in respect of a prospective purchaser to the site owner for approval. No amendments have been proposed.

Question, That the Committee is content with Part 3 of the schedule, put and agreed to.

Part 3 of the schedule agreed to.

The Chairperson: Amendment EE, proposed by the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, would repeal the Unauthorised Encampments (Northern Ireland) Order 2005. Do you have any comments on that, Stephen?

Mr Martin: There are just two issues. The first is the potential scope of the amendment; the second is that the 2005 Order works very well. We monitor it, and we monitor the equality impact. Safeguards are built into the 2005 Order, so that people can only be moved on if there is somewhere for them to be moved on to. The police's use of the Order is proportionate. We do not feel the need to act on that, and, as Colm McQuillan said earlier, the number of unauthorised encampments has fallen, and the problem is being managed well. If the 2005 Order were to be repealed, that would create all kinds of difficulties.

The Chairperson: Are members content not to agree to amendment EE?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson: Amendment FF, which was separately proposed by the Housing Executive and the Human Rights Commission, would remove the requirement for the Housing Executive to obtain a licence for a Travellers' caravan site. The Minister of the Environment has written a letter about the proposed change and appears to support it, in so far as simplification is necessary to support the transfer of responsibility for Travellers' sites from councils to the Housing Executive. Do you wish to add anything, Stephen?

Mr Martin: The amendment completes the work that was done in 2003, and it should have happened then. The Bill presents an opportunity to redress that. The other point is that, under the Caravans Act (Northern Ireland) 1963, which requires site licences, a site licence cannot be sought until planning permission has been completed. During the planning process, there will be much negotiation and discussion. It adds a considerable amount of time to the process, but the Housing Executive is already duty-bound

in law to consider the health and safety aspects, which are a key site licensing requirement. Previously, councils did not require a site licence, and it does seem anomalous. The Minister stated his intention to complete the unfinished business of 2003 and support the Housing Executive's efforts to secure more sites in a timely way that would help to make this change. He will be keen to hear the Committee's views.

The Chairperson: It is potentially quite a controversial amendment. However, the legal anomaly has appeared, and councils now have the power to grant the licence. The amendment, perhaps, focuses on Travellers' caravan sites, but councils can grant licences for seasonal sites as well. Is that correct?

Mr Martin: Yes. Although there are certain exemptions, most sites require a licence.

The Chairperson: That gives councils a sense of control or protection over what happens with Traveller sites. They have the ability to grant the licence, and it gives a stronger sense of input from local government than would be the case through the planning process.

Mr Martin: Our reading of the letter from Minister Poots is that the planning process should be adequate for proper engagement to take place between local government and the Housing Executive. However, everybody will have a different view on that.

The Chairperson: Thank you for saying that. That leads me to point out that, having had some years of experience of the planning process, I do not necessarily agree with that. The cognisance given by the Planning Service to the concerns of local councils, or those of ratepayers expressed via local councils is, to put it politely, sporadic at best.

Notwithstanding the conversation that we had earlier — I understand the problems with Travellers' sites — I am concerned that the interests of a wider community, as expressed through its council and its councillors, would be significantly weakened. The current position, however it has arisen, would be significantly weakened if councils did not have the ability to grant licences.

Councils should look at each scenario in a sensible way and try to work with the Housing Executive to overcome any issues in a particular area. I encourage councils to do that, but there

is a need for local checks and balances, given the understandable sensitivities that often accompany such issues.

Mr Craig: I am happy to propose that we oppose the amendment. Believe it or not, there is only one caravan site in the whole of Lagan Valley. There were issues with that site, and, had it not been for our ability to use our licence power, those would never have been resolved. The removal of that power would mean that local government would lose its ability to intervene in such issues. Councils have few enough powers as it is. Why take one of them away?

Ms Lo: My view is quite different. The planning system would allow local opposition and enable local councils to voice their concerns. Eventually, it would be up to the council to approve or not to approve the proposals.

Mr Craig: The council is only a consultee in the planning process. Therefore, that would remove its teeth.

Ms Lo: Earlier, we said that we need more sites for Travellers, but now we are saying that we need to keep control of sites. I am strongly in favour of the amendment.

Ms Ní Chuilín: We should put it to a vote.

Mr Brady: I want to repeat a point that I made last week. If councils had taken the bull by the horns a number of years ago and sorted out everything in conjunction with government, it would not be an issue.

Fortunately, or unfortunately, I have never been a councillor. My experience of working with councils is that their attitude to Travellers is not particularly good. We are talking about particular councils with particular attitudes to Travellers. That is just a personal observation.

Jonathan mentioned that there is one site in the whole of Lagan Valley. In Newry, there are no sites, because Travellers there have been settled.

Mr Craig: The site that I mentioned is not a Travellers' site.

Mr Brady: I am making a general point about the attitudes of councils to Travellers.

Mr Craig: You could park your caravan down the road from me.

Mr Brady: Only with Alex's agreement.

Mr F McCann: Jonathan, I take it that there is no distinction between the caravan sites that you are talking about and the Travellers sites when it comes to the provisional licence. I declare an interest as a member of Belfast City Council, where I have witnessed some debates in which there has been fairly fierce opposition to Travellers. That has been the case in many councils. My difficulty is that many councils would use the power of licence to ensure that Travellers do not get on to sites in their territory. That is why there are Travellers in only a certain number of council areas.

The Chairperson: I expressed my view as an individual, not as Chairperson. I understand the arguments. The amendment rises or falls based on the planning process. If the Committee and the House were to support the amendment, that would be to say that the checks and balances that have been put in place during the current regime would be diminished on the basis of what is included in the planning process. Having served as a councillor for several years, I can testify that it is not as simple as it might appear to those who do not have such experience. Sometimes councils win; sometimes they lose.

We have already parked another part of the Bill. Is the Committee happy to park this as well, rather than taking a firm position now? Is the Committee happy that I, as Chairperson, speak to the Environment Minister about the implications for planning and about the point that Anna made about the controls being in place?

Members indicated assent.

Mr Craig: The controls are not in place, but you can speak to him about it.

The Chairperson: Jonathan, the point is that, if members are saying that they are content that the planning system has the checks and balances —

Mr Craig: The difficulty is that, if the review of public administration (RPA) had gone ahead, all that responsibility would have landed on the laps of councils anyway. Technically, this would have had no impact on councils, because they would have been directly responsible for planning anyway. They would have had the final say on whether a site received planning permission. Currently, they play a part only in the consultation process, and, removing the little power that they have would be counterproductive. I assume that, ultimately, we

will agree something, and they will be handed those powers anyway.

Mr Martin: I will clarify the position. The Department seeks an exemption from site-licensing requirements for sites that are provided by the Housing Executive specifically for Travellers. District councils currently operate that exemption for their sites. All other sites will still have to go through the site-licensing process.

The Chairperson: I understand that, but there is still an issue. Are we happy to park that on the basis of having conversations with the Department of the Environment (DOE)?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson: We will return to amendment FF at a later stage. There is no harm in parking it, because we have already parked amendment N.

Mr F McCann: You are doing some parking this morning.

The Chairperson: That makes only two. We are nearly there. The last one is amendment GG. The Housing Executive proposed the amendment, which removes the arrangements by which Travellers staying on a Housing Executive site of more than 400 sq yds are required to apply for site licences individually. Mr Poots has written stating that he does not support a change to the relevant positions. Members have a copy of that letter.

Mr Martin: I do not fully understand the issue. Given that the Minister of the Environment stated that there is good reason for not changing it, we do not have any basis for challenging that. We do not propose putting forward any amendment.

The Chairperson: I appreciate your candour, and I assure you that you are not the only person in the room not to understand fully.

Mr Martin: I should point out that amendment GG has not been provided to members, but the Chairperson accurately outlined it. The Minister for Social Development had written to Minister Poots to ask whether it could be changed. A fair summary of Minister Poots's reply is that he felt that it would not be a good idea.

The Chairperson: Are members content not to support amendment GG?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson: Several outstanding amendments remain, and clause-by-clause scrutiny will resume at a later meeting. Stephen, thank you very much for your help.

Written Answers

This section contains the written answers to questions tabled by Members.

The content of the responses is as received at the time from the relevant Minister or representative of the Assembly Commission, and it has not been subject to the official reporting (Hansard) process or changed.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 8 October 2010

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

New York Stock Exchange Office in Belfast

Mr S Anderson asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for their assessment of the potential economic benefits of the New York Stock Exchange's new premises in Belfast.

(AQW 549/11)

First Minister and deputy First Minister (Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness): The New York Stock Exchange's new premises in Belfast reflects its confidence in Northern Ireland and is an example of the mutual benefit to be gained from ongoing engagement between those of us involved in economic development and key investors. It sends a strong message to other potential investors, that this is an exceptional place to do business. This investment is an example of how, by building strong relationships with potential investors, we increase the chances of attracting world-class companies to set up and develop their operations here, which is vital to growing our economy. We attended the official opening of NYSE Technologies' new Belfast premises at Adelaide Exchange, on 16th September 2010. This expansion of Belfast operations will create up to 400 high-quality technical, operational and corporate jobs, over a 3 to 4 year period. Invest NI has agreed to provide financial assistance of £9,578,364 to the expansion project.

Capital Projects in the North Down Area

Mr P Weir asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on all their Department's capital projects in the North Down area that (i) were or will be commenced or completed in 2010/11; (ii) are planned for 2011/12; and (iii) have been postponed because of budgetary constraints.

(AQW 596/11)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: OFMDFM is not currently undertaking any capital projects in the North Down area in 2010-11, nor are any planned in 2011-12. No such projects have been postponed for any reason.

Invest NI Business Park at Melmount Road, Strabane

Mr P Doherty asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether the Planning Appeals Commission will reconsider its decision to retain the designation of the Adria site in Strabane for industrial use only, in light of the recent announcement that planning permission has been granted for an 11.5 hectare Invest NI Business Park at Melmount Road, Strabane.

(AQW 668/11)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: The Planning Appeals Commission is an independent tribunal Non-Departmental Public Body. Given its independent tribunal status, its Chief Commissioner has been asked to provide a response directly to you, and we understand that she has written to you in the following terms:

"I have been asked to provide you with information requested in the above Assembly Question.

The Commission issued a decision to refuse this appeal on 26 October 2009. Once a decision has been made on an appeal, the Commission cannot review or revise its determination. PAC decisions may be challenged by application for a judicial review to the High Court. However, this must be done promptly or in any event within three months of the appeal decision.

I would be happy to provide any further information you require arising out of this response or to meet with you to discuss the matter if that would be more suitable.”

Child Poverty Strategy

Mr D McKay asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline any work their Department is currently undertaking in relation to child poverty and developing a Child Poverty Strategy.
(AQW 673/11)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: The Child Poverty Act 2010, that gained Royal Assent on 25 March this year, requires us to develop three-year child poverty strategies that will lead to the eradication of child poverty by 2020. The first strategy will set out the actions that all government departments are taking to contribute to meeting the targets in the Act and must be laid before the Assembly by 25 March 2011.

Formal consultation on the proposed strategy is planned for October 2010. In advance of this, however, our officials issued, as part of a pre-consultation exercise, a discussion paper entitled “Starting the Discussion”. External stakeholders and government departments were asked to consider the issues raised in the document and responses are being considered at present.

Junior Ministers launched a conference on Thursday 23 September 2010 as part of the pre-consultation process and a conference report will be published. The event identified some of the key issues affecting children experiencing poverty, and its findings and recommendations will underpin and inform the formal consultation document we intend to issue in October 2010.

Officials have met with numerous organisations, individuals and groups as part of the pre-consultation process and will publish a communications strategy for the formal consultation process shortly. The three strands of the strategy will cover children and young people, parents and organisations.

The formal consultation process will run until late December 2010/early January 2011. There will be a number of stakeholder events at various locations including events and engagements specifically for children and young people and for parents.

Equality Act 2010

Dr S Farry asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, given that the Equality Act 2010 is due to come into operation in October 2010, for their assessment of the differences between equality law in Northern Ireland and that in England and Wales; and what plans they have to address these differences.
(AQW 724/11)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: No formal assessment has been carried out by OFMDFM on the differences between equality law here and that in England and Wales.

Whilst no policy decision has been taken regarding amending Equality legislation, the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister continues to legislate in order to provide legal protection against discrimination and to promote equality of opportunity.

New York Stock Exchange Office in Belfast

Mr P Weir asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for their assessment of the potential economic benefits of the New York Stock Exchange office in Belfast.
(AQW 772/11)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: We refer the member to the answer to AQW 549/11 which was answered on 7 October 2010.

Outstanding Executive Business

Mr G Savage asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline what progress has been made on the Junior Ministers' working group on outstanding Executive business; and how many times the group has met.

(AQW 794/11)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: The content of Executive papers and all aspects of Executive business are confidential.

Outstanding Executive Business

Mr G Savage asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) if they will publish the programme of work agreed by the Junior Ministers' working group on outstanding Executive business; and (ii) to detail the issues that have been resolved and the issues that have yet to be resolved.

(AQW 795/11)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: The content of Executive papers and all aspects of Executive business are confidential.

Expected Budget Cuts

Mr J O'Dowd asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what steps they are taking to discuss the expected budget cuts directly with the British Government, given the potential impact on the local economy and the community.

(AQO 130/11)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: The Finance Minister, Sammy Wilson, has had a number of meetings with Treasury Ministers over recent months to discuss the 2010 UK Spending Review. As recently as last Wednesday he met with the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, along with his Scottish and Welsh counterparts. We are also meeting the Chancellor of the Exchequer, George Osborne on 28 September 2010 in advance of a meeting with the Prime Minister in October.

The Finance Minister has repeatedly stressed the need for transparency, fairness and full early engagement in the 2010 UK Spending Review allocation process.

Hillsborough Agreement

Mr G Savage asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what is the legal status of the Hillsborough Agreement.

(AQW 823/11)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: The Hillsborough Castle Agreement represents and derives authority from its status as an agreement between the political parties we represent as co-chairs of the Northern Ireland Executive. Where appropriate, the commitments set out in the Agreement have been subsequently brought by us to the Executive and Assembly, or will be so, and consequently have legal status as decisions of those bodies.

Surplus Land

Dr A McDonnell asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail any (i) land; and (ii) property owned by their Department which is currently deemed surplus to requirements, including the location of the land or property and any plans for its disposal.

(AQW 824/11)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: The Department is currently holding one asset comprising land and buildings that is deemed surplus to requirements. This asset is located in Ballymena. The Capital assets Realisation Taskforce (Strategic Investment Board) has been tasked with the disposal of the asset.

Outstanding Executive Papers

Ms M Ritchie asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the estimated timescale to address all outstanding Executive papers; and if they will make a statement on this matter.
(AQW 938/11)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: The content of Executive papers and all aspects of Executive business are confidential.

Outstanding Executive Papers

Ms M Ritchie asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to list the Executive papers which are currently outstanding including when these papers were first submitted and their current status; and if they will make a statement on this matter.
(AQW 995/11)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: The content of Executive papers and all aspects of Executive business are confidential.

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Real Milk

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what her Department is doing to protect the status of real milk, given the recent increase in the availability of milk substitutes.
(AQW 419/11)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms M Gildernew): The increase in availability of food products is entirely market driven and our consumers reasonably expect to have a choice in what they decide to purchase. While food labelling, including the labelling of milk and milk substitutes, is the responsibility of the Food Standards Agency, I have made clear my view that it is important that products are clearly and unambiguously labelled so that consumers are able to make an informed choice.

My own Department provides the local dairy industry with significant support through CAFRE and AFBI to help improve its competitiveness and future sustainability. Financial assistance is also available under the EU School Milk Scheme, the Regional Food Programme and the Rural Development Programme. There are strict EU rules on support by Government for advertising and promotional activities but within these the Dairy Council for the north of Ireland, with EU support, undertakes generic advertising and promotional activities for cows' milk and milk products.

Tourism Development Scheme Bids

Mr C McDevitt asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail (i) the number of Tourism Development Scheme bids received by her Department in the current funding round; (ii) the total number that have been approved; (iii) the total number outstanding; and (iv) the total value of (a) approved; and (b) outstanding bids.
(AQW 423/11)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: My Department provides support for tourism under of Axis 3 of the NIRD 2007-2013, Measure 3.3 - Encouragement of Tourism Activities. This measure has received 426 applications of which 80, with a value of £5.687m have been approved. Presently

87 applications valued at £7.96m are outstanding, 65 of which are currently under appraisal by Local Action Groups.

2010 National Ploughing Championships at Athy, County Kildare

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for a breakdown of the cost of her Department's involvement in the 2010 National Ploughing Championships at Athy, County Kildare. (AQW 454/11)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Most of the costs for the DARD Exhibition at the 2010 National and European Ploughing Championships event, which was held at Athy, Co Kildare between 21 and 23 September 2010 have not yet been finalised.

To date only costs for the hire of trade space and the supply of electricity have been finalised. These costs amount to £4,097.50.

I will write to you again, to provide details of the other costs, when they have been finalised.

Licensed Dog Kennels

Mr J O'Dowd asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how often licensed dog kennels are inspected; and to outline the procedure for lodging complaints against licensed kennels for alleged breaches of contract or mistreatment of dogs. (AQW 456/11)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The Veterinary Service aims to inspect each licensed dog kennel annually. A kennel that is the subject of a welfare complaint from a member of the public is inspected within one working day of DARD receiving the complaint. Customers using a boarding establishment are entitled to complain to the owners of the kennels if they have an issue with breach of contract. Clearly they are entitled to use the normal legal mechanisms that are in place to deal with any failure by a business to deliver what it has been contracted to do. If a member of the public has a complaint about the welfare of animals being kept in a boarding establishment they are welcome to complain to DARD either through the DARD helpline or via a local DARD office.

The welfare of the animals kept in a boarding kennel is covered by the Welfare of Animals Act (NI) 1972 and the Boarding Establishments Regulations (NI) 1974.

Farm Modernisation Programme

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many farmers have benefited to date from the Farm Modernisation Programme in South Antrim. (AQW 489/11)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: To date, Letters of Offer with a total value of £168,961 have been issued to 41 farm businesses in the South Antrim constituency under the Farm Modernisation Programme (FMP). An additional 4 farm business received Letters of Offer with a total value of £40,000 under the Manure Efficiency Technology Sub Programme (METS).

Peace III Partnership Staff

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the (i) religion; and (ii) gender of the staff employed in each Peace III Partnership. (AQW 665/11)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: My Department does not distribute any Peace III funds and therefore is not privy to the religion or gender of any Peace III Partnership staff.

Local Action Group Staff

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the (i) religion; and (ii) gender of the staff employed in each Local action Group.
(AQW 666/11)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Local Action Groups do not employ any staff. However, the Lead Administrative Council for each geographical cluster provides the staff complement, and is the employer. My Department would not have details of the religion or gender of these Council staff.

Land Parcel Identification System

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how much funding her Department has set aside for the re-mapping of all farms in the Land Parcel Identification system.
(AQW 728/11)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: For the 2010/11 financial year, I have set aside £4.8 million for the re-mapping of nearly 750,000 fields on the Land Parcel Identification System.

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

Sports and Community Arts Sectors

Mr B Leonard asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how he intends to protect the jobs and community services provided by the sports and community arts sectors in the current financial climate.
(AQW 422/11)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr N McCausland): Along with colleagues in the Northern Ireland Executive, I am currently engaged in providing critical inputs to the Comprehensive Spending Review 2010, managed by the Department of Finance and Personnel. Ongoing, complex work within my department, including input from its Arms Length Bodies, involves looking at all areas of spend across the DCAL profile including Sports, Arts, Libraries and Museums. Once the Northern Ireland Executive has announced the final allocations for all the Northern Ireland Departments, I will give due consideration to the allocations of funding to all spending areas falling within my Department's remit. In doing so I will take full account of the impact such allocations will have across the culture, arts and leisure sector.

Illegal Salmon Netting

Mr D Kinahan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how many incidents of illegal salmon netting his Department has detected in each of the last five years; and what steps his Department is taking to stop this activity.
(AQW 635/11)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The table below provides details of illegal fishing nets seized in the DCAL jurisdiction over the past five years.

Year	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Total nets seized	7,650yds	9,875yds	3,770yds	330yds	10,100yds

These figures are for all illegal fishing nets seized as it is not possible in all cases to accurately determine those nets specifically targeting salmon and those nets targeting other fish species.

My Department has been directly responsible for the conservation and protection of salmon and inland fisheries in the DCAL jurisdiction since 1 June 2009. Prior to that date fisheries protection functions were carried out by the former Fisheries Conservancy Board.

Fisheries Protection Officers (FPO's) carry out regular patrols on land and water throughout the DCAL operational area and monitor and check angling and commercial fishing activities to ensure those engaged comply fully with fisheries legislation.

Intelligence led operations are carried out to detect breaches of fisheries legislation. All illegal fishing gear/catches are seized and any persons found to be acting illegally are reported with a view to prosecution.

FPO's also carry out regular inspections at commercial dealers, fish retail outlets, hotels and restaurants to ensure that all freshwater fish being sold have been legally caught.

Poaching

Mr D Kinahan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (i) for his assessment of the current level of poaching in the (a) Glenariff; (b) Dun; and (c) Dall rivers; (ii) what impact this is having on fish stocks in these rivers; and (iii) what action his Department is taking to address this issue.

(AQW 636/11)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: DCAL Fisheries Protection Officers (FPO's) have received some anecdotal information on poaching in the three named rivers. Direct evidence has been received confirming the targeting of fish in the Glenariff River. In this case a concealed net was discovered and subsequently passed to FPO's. To date there has been no evidence to confirm poaching activity in either the Dun or the Dall.

There are a wide range of complex factors that affect fish stocks and without more specific information on the numbers of fish being taken by poachers it is difficult to give any meaningful assessment of the impact of poaching in these rivers. However, the loss of any adult fish has the immediate effect of reducing the numbers available for anglers and in the longer term reduces the potential breeding stock in that river.

FPO's carry out regular patrols on land and water throughout the DCAL operational area and monitor and check angling and commercial fishing activities to ensure those engaged comply fully with fisheries legislation. All reports of alleged poaching are assessed by enforcement managers. Patrols in the area in question have been increased recently on the basis of intelligence. A meeting was held with the Police Service of Northern Ireland on 20 September 2010 to ensure a co-ordinated approach to this issue.

FPO's have also been working closely with the local angling club, which has appointed some of its members as private water bailiffs. Members of the club attended a DCAL information evening in April 2010 aimed at providing private water bailiffs with information on fisheries legislation and operational enforcement.

Ticket-touting

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure why his Department's support for legislation to deal with ticket-touting applies only to football and not to other sports or non-sporting ticketed events.

(AQW 699/11)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I am aware that the Department of Justice (DoJ) is proposing to introduce new sports grounds related criminal justice legislation to help preserve good order and improve public safety at major sports grounds. DoJ has stated publicly that, in this context, it wishes to bring forward legislation to ensure that the sale of tickets by touts does not undermine steps taken by football clubs, in the interests of preserving good order and maintaining public safety, to segregate opposing fans at major football grounds. Unlike football, other sports and non-sporting ticketed events have not traditionally found it necessary, for public safety or other reasons, to introduce similar segregation measures at their venues. I understand that, as a consequence of this, DoJ does not presently see a need to extend its proposed ticket-touting legislation to them. My Department therefore supports DoJ's proposal on that basis.

Shared Sports Stadium

Mr C Lyttle asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline the estimated costings for a shared sports stadium, to include soccer and rugby, at Boucher playing fields, Boucher Road, Belfast; and why this was dismissed as a viable option.

(AQW 739/11)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: As the draft Outline Business Case on regional stadium provision for football, rugby and Gaelic games is currently under consideration by my Department it would be inappropriate for me to provide any of the detail you have requested.

Department of Education

Translation of Departmental Papers

Mr A Bresland asked the Minister of Education how much her Department spent on the translation of departmental papers into (i) Irish; and (ii) Ulster-Scots in (a) 2007/08; (b) 2008/09; and (c) 2009/10 **(AQW 389/11)**

Minister of Education (Ms C Ruane): Is mar seo a leanas a bhí caiteachas na Roinne Oideachais ar cháipéisí roinne a aistriú go Gaeilge agus go hAlbainis Uladh:

The Department of Education's expenditure on the translation of departmental papers into Irish and Ulster-Scots, was as follows:

	a) 2007/08	b) 2008/09	c) 2009/10
i) Irish	£13,274	£47,062	£38,830
ii) Ulster-Scots	£108	£261	£35

My Department's use of Irish stems from the Good Friday Agreement and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, which promote, facilitate and encourage the use of the Irish language. There are thirty-six Irish medium units and schools across the north of Ireland. I aim to respect their expectation and that of all other Irish speakers to receive written communications from my Department in their language of choice.

Prosecution of Parents for the Non-attendance of Pupils

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 93/11, whether the prosecution of parents for the non-attendance of their children at school also applies to traveller parents.

(AQW 398/11)

Minister of Education: Tá feidhm freisin ar thuismitheoirí den lucht siúil ag ionchúiseamh na dtuismitheoirí de dheasca neamhfhreastal a bpáistí. Tá deacrachtaí ar leith a bhaineann le freastal rialta na bpáistí den lucht siúil a bhaint amach ós rud é go bhfuil stíl fhánaithe mhaireachtála ag cuid mhór acu.

The prosecution of parents for the non-attendance of their children at school also applies to Traveller parents. There are particular difficulties in securing the regular attendance of children of the Traveller community given that many of them have a nomadic lifestyle. Schedule 13 Part II paragraph 3.3 of the Education and Libraries (NI) Order 1986 states that if proceedings are brought and it is proved that the child has no fixed abode, the parent shall be entitled to be acquitted if they prove that they are engaged in any trade or business which requires them to travel from place to place and that the child has attended the school as regularly as the parent's trade or business permitted. However, in the case of a child who has attained the age of six, he or she must have attended the school at least one hundred days during the twelve month period ending with the date on which the proceedings were instituted.

In September 2008 I established the Taskforce on Traveller Education to review the educational needs of Traveller children and the current delivery of services and make recommendations to improve educational access, attainment and outcomes. The report of the Taskforce findings, which is due to be presented to the Department by the end of this year, will assist in producing an action plan on Traveller education.

In August 2010 a school circular was issued on the Education and Inclusion of Children and Young People from the Traveller Community. The circular includes guidance on the management of attendance.

Capital Projects

Mr S Moutray asked the Minister of Education for an update on all her Department's capital projects in each constituency that (i) were or will be commenced or completed in 2010/11; (ii) are planned for 2011/12; and (iii) have been postponed because of budgetary constraints.

(AQW 494/11)

Minister of Education: Cuireadh i gcrích na tionscadail ollchaipitil seo a leanas chun foirgnimh nua scoile a sholáthar nó cuireadh tús le hoibreacha tógála orthu sa bhliain airgeadais 2010/11.

The following major capital projects to provide new school buildings were completed or have commenced construction works in the 2010/11 financial year.

Constituency	School	Project Details
Belfast North	Belfast Model School for Boys	Completed
Foyle	St Mary's College, Derry	Completed
Foyle	St Cecilia's College, Derry	Completed
Foyle	Lisnagelvin P.S. Derry	Completed
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	Lisbellaw P.S.	Completed
North Antrim	St Mary's P.S. Portglenone	Completed
Strangford	St Joseph's P.S. Carryduff	Completed
Belfast North	Whitehouse P.S. Newtownabbey	Commenced

Funding to allow construction work to start in 2010/11 on a further thirteen major capital projects was made available in August 2010. These projects are as follows:-

Constituency	School	Project Details
Belfast East	Strathearn G.S. Belfast	New school
Belfast South	Taughmonagh P.S. Belfast	New school
Belfast West	Scoil na Fuiseoige, Twinbrook	New school
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	Coranny & Cornagague P.S. Roslea	New school
Lagan Valley	St Colman's P.S. Lambeg	New school
Mid Ulster	Magherafelt P.S. & N.S.	New schools
Mid Ulster	St Columba's P.S. Straw	New school
Newry & Armagh	Dromintee P.S. Newry	New school
Newry & Armagh	St Joseph's P.S. Madden	New school
Newry & Armagh	St Oliver Plunkett's P.S. Forkhill	New school

Constituency	School	Project Details
North Down	Bangor G.S.	New school
South Down	Carrick P.S. Warrenpoint	New school
South Down	St Mary's P.S. Newcastle	New school

My Department also has a number of other major capital projects recorded in the Investment Delivery Plan (IDP). These are listed below.

Constituency	School	Project Details
Belfast East	Greenwood Assessment Centre	New school
Belfast East	Knockbreda H.S.	New school
Belfast East	Lagan College (PPP)	New school
Belfast East	Mitchell House Special School	New school
Belfast East	Strand / Sydenham P.S.	New school
Belfast East	Strandtown P.S.	New school
Belfast North	Glenwood P.S. / Edenderry N.S.	New schools
Belfast North	Little Flower Girls S.S.	New school
Belfast South	Methodist College	New school
Belfast South	Victoria College	New school
Belfast West	Colaiste Feirste	Ext / Refurb
Belfast West	Springhill P.S.	New school
East Derry	Ballykelly P.S. Limavady	New school
East Derry	Limegrove/Glasvey Special School	New school
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	Coranny & Cornagague P.S. Roslea	New school
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	Devenish College, Enniskillen	New school
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	Enniskillen Model P.S.	New school
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	St Patrick's Academy, Dungannon	New school
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	St Paul's P.S. Irvinestown	New school
Foyle	Belmont Special School, Derry	New school
Foyle	Ebrington P.S. Derry	New school
Foyle	Eglinton P.S. Derry	New school
Foyle	Foyle & Londonderry College	New school
Foyle	New buildings P.S. Derry	New school
Lagan Valley	Dromore Central P.S.	New school
Mid Ulster	Edendork P.S. Dungannon	New school
Mid Ulster	Holy Family P.S. Magherafelt	New school
Mid Ulster	Holy Trinity College, Cookstown	New school

Constituency	School	Project Details
Mid Ulster	Rainey Endowed School	New school
Magherafelt		
Newry & Armagh	St Clare's Abbey P.S. Newry	New school
Newry & Armagh	St Joseph's Convent P.S. Newry	New school
Newry & Armagh	St Patrick's G.S. Armagh	Ext / Refurb
North Antrim	Ballymoney H.S.	New school
North Down	Hollywood / Redburn P.S.	New school
North Down	Hollywood Nursery School	New school
North Down	Priory College, Hollywood	New school
North Down	St Columbanus College, Bangor	New school
South Antrim	Parkhall College, Antrim	New school
South Down	Knockevin Special School	New school
Downpatrick		
South Down	St Bronagh's P.S. Rostrevor	New school
South Down	St Louis G.S. Kilkeel	New school
South Down	The High School, Ballynahinch	New school
Strangford	Glastry College, Ballyhalbert	New school
Strangford	Tor Bank Special School	New school
Dundonald (PPP)		
Upper Bann	Lurgan College	New school
Upper Bann	Portadown College	New school
Upper Bann	St Mary's P.S. Banbridge	New school
Upper Bann	St Patrick's College Banbridge	New school
Upper Bann	St Teresa's P.S. Lurgan	New school
Upper Bann	Tannaghmore P.S. Lurgan	New school
West Tyrone	Artigarvan P.S. Strabane	New school
West Tyrone	Arvalee / Cranny Special School	New school
Omagh		
West Tyrone	Dean Maguirc College,	New school
Carrickmore		
West Tyrone	Loreto G.S. Omagh	New school
West Tyrone	Omagh Integrated P.S.	New school
West Tyrone	St Columbkille's P.S.	New school
Carrickmore		

Constituency	School	Project Details
West Tyrone	St Conor's P.S. Omagh	New school

It is the intention, subject to the resolution of any outstanding issues, to progress with these projects. However, the timing as to when these projects might commence, with the exception of Lagan College and Tor Bank Special School, can only be considered when the capital budget position for the coming years has been determined by the Executive. As such I cannot say if any of these projects will commence in 2011/12.

Subject to the project achieving all necessary approvals, it is anticipated that the construction of Lagan College and Tor Bank Special School will commence in 2011/12.

I will continue to press the case with the Executive for significant capital funds for the schools estate.

Transport to Special Schools

Mr M Durkan asked the Minister of Education how many children are currently transported to special schools by (i) taxi; (ii) private hire buses; and (iii) buses owned by the Education and Library Board, in each Education and Library Board area.

(AQW 509/11)

Minister of Education: Chuir na Boird Oideachais agus Leabharlann in iúl dom gur mar atá soláthraithe sa tábla thíos atá líon na bpáistí a iompraítear ar scoileanna speisialta (i) i dtacsáí; (ii) i mbusanna fruilithe príobháideacha; agus (iii) i mbusanna ar leis an Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlann, i ngach limistéar Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlann, iad, don bhliain airgeadais 2009-10.

I have been advised by the Education & Library Boards that the number of children currently transported to special schools by (i) taxi; (ii) private hire buses; and (iii) buses owned by the Education and Library Board, in each Education and Library Board area, for the 2009-10 financial year are as provided in the table below.

Education and Library Board Area	(i) Taxi	(ii) Private Hire Buses	(iii) Board Buses
Belfast	65	328	621
North-Eastern	256	302	576
South-Eastern	167	93	1,046
Southern	128	21	353
Western	68	38	567

The Education and Library's policy states that "escorts are provided, where required, to ensure the safety of children on the recommendation of the Designated Special Education Officer".

As a contractual requirement, all private hire contractors must only supply personnel who have been Access NI checked.

All escorts when present and drivers are also subject to an enhanced Access NI criminal record check.

Transport to Special Schools

Mr M Durkan asked the Minister of Education how many children are currently transported to special schools by taxi without a vetted adult attending in each Education and Library Board area.

(AQW 511/11)

Minister of Education: Chuir na Boird Oideachais agus Leabharlann in iúl dom go bhfuil líon na bpáistí a iompraítear ar scoileanna speisialta i dtacsáí gan aosach scagtha nach bhfuil duine comórtha leis i ngach limistéar Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlann mar atá soláthraithe sa tábla thíos;

I am advised by the Education and Library Boards that children currently transported to special schools by taxi without a vetted adult that is without an escort attending in each Education and Library Board area is as provided in the table below;

Education and Library Board area	Pupils travelling in taxis without a vetted adult (escort)
Belfast	113
North Eastern	0
South Eastern	92
Southern	20
Western	78

The Education and Library's policy states that "escorts are provided, where required, to ensure the safety of children on the recommendation of the Designated Special Education Officer".

As a contractual requirement, all private hire contractors must only supply personnel who have been Access NI checked.

All escorts when present and drivers are also subject to an enhanced Access NI criminal record check.

Health and Safety Issues

Mr M Storey asked the Minister of Education to list the schools which have reported health and safety issues in relation to school buildings and grounds, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 525/11)

Minister of Education: Níl fáil ar an eolas a d'iarr tú. Thuairiscigh na Boird Oideachais agus Leabharlann, atá freagrach as cothabháil i ngach scoil seachas Scoileanna Deonacha Gramadaí agus Scoileanna Imeachtha faoi Chothabháil Stáit, nach bhfuil go leor soiléire ann maidir leis an sainmhíniú ar cad is obair ar shláinte agus shábháilteacht ann agus dá bharr sin, ní bhíonn an t-eolas a d'iarr tú á choinneáil ar a bhunachar sonraí um bhainistiú an eastáit.

The information you have requested is not available. The Education and Library Boards, which are responsible for maintenance of all schools with the exception of Voluntary Grammar Schools and Grant Maintained Integrated schools, have reported that because of the lack of clarity surrounding the definition of what constitutes health and safety work they do not hold the information you have requested on their estate management database.

Boards record all requests for maintenance work on the estate management database system. Maintenance is defined as the 'make good' cost necessary to bring school buildings back to the condition that they had when they were built. Maintenance includes any urgent work to address health and safety issues and avoid serious deterioration of the fabric or services to the building.

The ELBs, working with the Department, are in the process of introducing additional fields on the database which will capture more specific information on reported health and safety works.

Teacher:Pupil Ratio

Mr M Storey asked the Minister of Education to detail the teacher-pupil ratio in each school, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 527/11)

Minister of Education: Shocraigh mé go gcuirfear i Leabharlann an Tionóil eolas ar na cóimheasa múinteoirí is daltaí i ngach scoil.

I have arranged for information on teacher-pupil ratios for all schools to be placed in the Assembly Library.

Telephony Services to the Education and Library Boards

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Education (i) to list the companies currently providing telephony services to each Education and Library Board; and (ii) to detail the cost of telephony services to each Education and Library Board, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 570/11)

Minister of Education:

- (i) Is mionsonraithe sna táblaí thíos atá na comhlachtaí atá ag soláthar seirbhísí teileafónaíochta do gach Bord Oideachais agus Leabharlann agus costais na seirbhísí teileafónaíochta a thit ar gach Bord Oideachais agus Leabharlann i ngach bliain de na cúig bliana a chuaigh thart.
- (ii) The companies currently providing telephony services to each Education and Library Board and the costs of telephony services to each Education and Library Board in each of the last five years are detailed in the tables below.

TABLE 1: SERVICE PROVIDERS

Education and Library Board (ELB)	Service Provider (For Landline services only)
BELB	BT and Cable & Wireless
NEELB	BT
SEELB	BT and Cable and Wireless
SELB	BT; Morriston Ltd (Atlas) and Cable and Wireless
WELB	BT

TABLE 2: COSTS (£'S)

Year	2005/06 £	2006/07 £	2007/08 £	2008/09 £	2009/10 £
BELB	198,949	206,381	148,867	214,699	175,080
NEELB	221,324	230,445	228,099	237,984	200,199
SEELB	209,904	178,850	136,943	124,073	95,164
SELB	242,067	264,618	292,774	302,668	252,504
WELB	195,380	200,165	208,021	223,354	184,074

Notes:

1. The providers and costs provided relate to landline type telephony services only.
2. Costs are those associated with ELBs headquarters, with the majority relating to the provision of support services to schools and pupils such as CASS, transport, youth services etc.
3. Costs also include public library service up to and including 2008/09.
- (ii) The tender process undertaken to ensure value for money in the provision of telephony services to the Education and Library Boards

BELB

The Belfast Education and Library Board has contracts with Cable & Wireless and Orange under a Pan Government contract administered by the Office of Government Commerce.

SELB

The Southern Education and Library Board currently use Cable & Wireless for fixed telephony services and Vodafone for mobile telephony service. Both services are procured under the OGC Frameworks for Pan Government Sector RM 374 for fixed and RM 526 for mobile.

SEELB

In accordance with the guidance on Procurement Control Limits used by N I Departments, their Agencies and Non-Departmental public bodies, for the procurement of general goods, services and works, the South Eastern Education and Library Board publicly advertise all tender opportunities over £30k to ensure they are open to all SMEs and SEEs. Since October 2009 all tenders are also available on the eSourcing NI website.

In relation to the Board's contracts for the provision of telephony services the maintenance of Meridian Telephony Switch at SEELB HQ is regarded as a selected tender as we chose a number of firms to tender for the service. For the other two telephony contracts, we use Pan Government Frameworks established by the Office of Government Commerce (OGC) as they aggregate the demand for the entire United Kingdom public sector. We consider this to process is best for the Board as it streamlines the procurement process and attains value for money.

NEELB

The North Eastern Education and Library Board used the OGC Framework Agreement that delivers a range of commoditised and specialized telecoms goods and services through many suppliers including BT. The Reference for this Agreement is RM374 with a start date of 8 January 2008 and end date of 7 January 2012.

WELB

In August 2010 the Western Education and Library Board entered into a BT Business One Plan covering the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2012. This BT Business One Plan will provide a 5% discount when compared with the Board's previous spend with BT.

BT is included as a nominated supplier for the provision of telecoms services within the Office of Government Commerce (OGC) / Buying Solutions Framework Agreements. The relevant OGC Framework Agreement reference is:

Sector: Pan Government

Framework reference: RM 374

Framework title: Telecom Networks – Voice calls and lines

Framework effective from: 8 January 2008

Framework expires on: 7 January 2012

The benefits of using the OGC / Buying Solutions Framework Agreement include;

- The Framework provides access to a select list of suppliers with demonstrated competencies in the required areas of expertise;
- The Framework reduces the time and cost associated with procurement by offering a pre-tendered call-off facility; and
- The Framework provides compliance with EU procurement legislation.

Telephony Services to the Education and Library Boards

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Education to outline the tender process undertaken to ensure value for money in the provision of telephony services to the Education and Library Boards.

(AQW 571/11)

Minister of Education:

- (i) Is mionsonraithe sna táblaí thíos atá na comhlachtaí atá ag soláthar seirbhísí teileafónaíochta do gach Bord Oideachais agus Leabharlann agus costais na seirbhísí teileafónaíochta a thit ar gach Bord Oideachais agus Leabharlann i ngach bliain de na cúig bliana a chuaigh thart.
- (ii) The companies currently providing telephony services to each Education and Library Board and the costs of telephony services to each Education and Library Board in each of the last five years are detailed in the tables below.

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- The Framework provides access to a select list of suppliers with demonstrated competencies in the required areas of expertise;
- The Framework reduces the time and cost associated with procurement by offering a pre-tendered call-off facility; and
- The Framework provides compliance with EU procurement legislation.

Equality and All-Ireland Directorate

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Education (i) to outline the job description of the Director of Equality and All-Ireland Directorate; (ii) when this position was created; and (iii) whether there is an east/west equivalent.

(AQW 572/11)

Minister of Education: Tá freagrachtaí an Cheannaire um Chomhionannas agus an Stiúrthóireacht Uile-Éireann leagtha amach thíos. Bunaíodh an post seo i mí na Bealtaine sa bhliain 2009 agus tá sé freagrach as saincheisteanna thoir/thiar.

The responsibilities of the Head of Equality and All Ireland Directorate are set out below. The post was established in May 2009 and includes responsibilities for east/west matters.

Equality and All-Ireland Directorate

This directorate sits at the heart of the Department and has the key role of providing co-ordination and other services in support of the Minister and top management, and a substantive locus for legislation work. In particular, it has the key role in ensuring that equality considerations are paramount within the work of all the other Directorates, and in that capacity it exercises a co-ordination and challenge role in relation to policy development across the Department. In discharging that role it also has regard to all-Ireland issues, ensuring that policy development takes account of corresponding provision in the South, and promoting opportunities for all-Ireland engagement as appropriate.

The directorate is responsible for a number of other functions including staffing, planning, and personnel issues for Departmental staff, and promoting effective communication both internally and externally. It provides the secretariat to the Departmental Board and Top Management Group (TMG).

Key Interfaces: In the nature of its work, this directorate liaises continually with colleagues across the Department and with counterparts in Dublin as required. It will also interface directly with ESA (when established) on those Assembly Questions that relate to operational or service-delivery issues; and with Assembly staff as required.

Main Responsibilities

(a) *Equality and all-Ireland Issues:*

- Equality scrutiny and challenge, and liaison with the Equality Commission.
- All-Ireland issues and promotion of contact on issues of common interest.
- Diversity and Targeting Social Need.
- NSMC co-ordination.

(b) *Central Co-ordination and Top Management Support:*

- Support for Minister (Private Office).
- Assembly liaison.
- Answers to Assembly Questions.
- Secretariat to Departmental Board and TMG.
- Miscellaneous queries and corporate issues.
- Public appointments.
- Office services – including accommodation, ICT and telephony.
- Information management.
- Personnel/human resource functions including workforce planning, managing attendance and employer equal opportunities responsibilities.
- Business improvement – improving efficiency in business processes and reducing the bureaucratic burden on schools, etc.

(c) Legislation

- Primary legislation (including Review of Public Administration Bills).
- Revision and consolidation of education law.
- Subordinate legislation (regulations, orders, etc as required).

(d) Media and Communications

- Departmental communications strategy, including website maintenance.
- Events management, including annual conference series for school leaders.
- Media handling.
- Briefing for visits.

(e) External Relations

- Education Advisory Forum (when established).
- British/Irish.
- European Union issues (excluding funding).
- OECD and USA,
- Sponsorship of sectoral bodies (on implementation of the RPA).
- Teacher & pupil exchange programmes.

Financial Assistance Under the Class Sizes Policy

Mr A Bresland asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) which schools received financial assistance under the Class Sizes policy and the amount each school received; and (ii) the criteria used to allocate this financial assistance in the 2010/11 academic year.

(AQW 598/11)

Minister of Education: Sa bhliain acadúil 2010/11, fuair 17 mbunscoil cistiú faoin bheartas um Méideanna Ranga. Riarann na Boird Oideachais agus Leabharlann an beartas seo agus sholáthair siad an t-eolas thíos i bpointe (i).

In the 2010/11 academic year, 17 primary schools received funding under the Class Sizes policy. The Education and Library Boards administer this policy and have supplied the information at (i) below:

The following schools received financial assistance for the 2010/11 academic year under the Class Sizes policy.

School	Amount
Euston Street Primary School, Belfast	£19,500
Springhill Primary School, Belfast	£19,500
Forge Integrated Primary School, Belfast	£19,500
Holy Cross Boys' Primary School, Belfast	£19,500
Holy Family Primary School, Belfast	£19,500
Our Lady's Girls' Primary School, Belfast	£19,500
Star of the Sea Primary School, Belfast	£19,500
St Malachy's Primary School, Belfast	£19,500
Drumahoe Primary School, Derry	£34,199
Omagh County Primary School	£17,100

School	Amount
Holy Trinity Primary School, Enniskillen	£17,100
St Canice's Primary School, Dungiven	£17,100
Enniskillen Integrated Primary School	£34,199
St Paul's Primary School, Enniskillen	£25,649
Steelstown Primary School, Derry	£34,199
Harmony Hill Primary School, Lisburn	£20,000
Lisnasharragh Primary School, Belfast	£20,000

- (ii) In order to be considered for funding in 2010/11, schools were required to meet the basic criterion that they expected to have a Pupil:Teacher Ratio in the 2010/11 school year above the north of Ireland average of 20.4:1.

Primary Schools

Mr P Doherty asked the Minister of Education to detail the percentage of primary schools in each sector that are currently located in (i) permanent builds; (ii) mobiles; and (iii) permanent builds and mobiles.

(AQW 669/11)

Minister of Education: Tá céatadán na mbunscoileanna i ngach earnáil liostaithe sa tábla thíos:

THE PERCENTAGE OF PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN EACH SECTOR IS LISTED IN THE TABLE BELOW:

	All permanent	%	All temporary	%	Mixed	%	Totals
Primary school controlled	194	50%	0	0%	180	46.6%	374
Primary schools integrated – controlled	9	50%	0	0%	7	38.9%	16
Primary schools integrated – grant maintained	4	17.4%	6	26%	10	43.5%	20
Irish medium primary	5	25%	8	40%	5	25%	18
Primary schools maintained	148	37%	0	0%	242	61%	390
							818

Please note - there are currently 849 primary schools in the schools' estate in the 09/10 year. The figures above show schools that were surveyed by the Education and Library Boards as part of the ongoing condition surveys of schools. Not all schools were surveyed for a number of reasons including where a new capital build is anticipated.

Tor Bank School, Dundonald

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Education how many (i) Speech and Language Therapist posts; and (ii) Occupational Health Therapist posts are currently funded by the Education and Library Board for the Tor Bank School, Dundonald.

(AQW 706/11)

Minister of Education: Chuir Príomhfheidhmeannach Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlann an Oirdheiscirt in iúl dom nach bhfuil aon phoist mar theiripeoirí urlabhra agus teanga ná mar theiripeoirí saothair faoi láthair atá maoinithe ag Bord Oideachais agus Leabharlann an Oirdheiscirt le haghaidh Tor Bank School, Dún Dónaill.

I have been advised by the Chief Executive of the South Eastern Education and Library Board that there are no speech and language or occupational therapist posts currently funded by the South Eastern Education and Library Board for Tor Bank School, Dundonald.

Tor Bank School, Dundonald

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of pupils (i) in total; and (ii) with autism currently attending the Tor Bank School, Dundonald.

(AQW 709/11)

Minister of Education: Níl figiúirí ar fáil go fóill don bhliain acadúil 2010/11. Taifeadadh sna figiúirí a bailíodh mar chuid den Daonáireamh Scoile sa bhliain 2009/10 go raibh 140 dalta rollaithe ar Tor Bank School, agus go raibh uathachas ar 54 dalta díobh seo.

Figures are not yet available for the 2010/11 academic year. Figures collected as part of the 2009/10 School Census recorded that there were 140 pupils enrolled in total at Tor Bank School, with 54 of these recorded as having autism.

Post-Primary School Places

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the number of meeting requests her Department received from Assembly Members to discuss pupil intake in post-primary schools; (ii) the number of meetings that subsequently took place; and (iii) the number of additional post-primary school places agreed as a result of these meetings.

(AQW 714/11)

Minister of Education: Fuair an Roinn Oideachais dhá iarratas ó Chomhaltaí an Tionóil ar iontógáil daltaí a plé in iarbhunscoileanna don scoilbhliain 2010/11. Tionóladh cruinniú amháin dá éis sin. Níor aontaíodh ar áiteanna breise iarbhunscoile mar gheall ar an chruinniú seo.

The Department of Education received two requests from Assembly Members to discuss pupil intake in post-primary schools for the 2010/11 school year. One meeting subsequently took place. No additional post-primary school places were agreed as a result of this meeting.

Newly Qualified Teachers

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of the newly qualified teachers (i) in total; and (ii) who have obtained permanent full-time teaching posts, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 717/11)

Minister of Education: Tá an t-eolas a iarradh mionsonraithe sa tábla thíos.

The information requested is in the table below.

Year	Total Graduates	Total Graduates who have obtained permanent teaching employment
2004/05	792	575
2005/06	816	527
2006/07	807	494
2007/08	805	404
2008/09	735	293

Childcare Strategy

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of Education how her Department contributes to the provision of childcare and the Childcare Strategy.

(AQW 726/11)

Minister of Education: Tairgeann an RO réimse sholáthar luathbhlianta, chun oideachas agus forbairt na bpáistí idir 0-6 bliain d'aois a chur chun cinn. Cé gurb eol dúinn go gcuireann tuismitheoirí soláthar réamhscoile agus scoile san áireamh agus iad ag déanamh socruithe cúram leanaí, níl an soláthar seo ceaptha go príomha le haghaidh bearta cúram leanaí.

DE offers a range of early years provision, to promote the education and development of children aged 0-6. While we are aware that parents take account of pre-school and school provision when they are making childcare arrangements, this provision is not intended primarily as a childcare measure.

OFMDFM are leading on the development of the Childcare Strategy. Consultants have been commissioned to conduct an economic and policy appraisal and my Department is represented at the Ministerial Sub Committee Children and Young People Sub Group on Poverty which is taking forward this process.

Whistleblower Case

Mr W Irwin asked the Minister of Education to name the school discussed in the recent whistleblower case that permanently appointed teachers to posts of responsibility whilst the substantive post-holder was still in post.

(AQW 757/11)

Minister of Education: D'ardaigh sceithire gan ainm buarthaí gur ceapadh múinteoirí i bpoist bhuana freagrachta, nuair a bhí na poist fós i seilbh shealbhóir substainteach an phoist in Laurelhill Community College.

An anonymous whistleblower raised concerns that teachers were appointed to permanent posts of responsibility whilst the posts were still being held by the substantive postholder in Laurelhill Community College.

These issues are properly a matter for the Board of Governors as the employer and the South Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB) as the employing authority. The Department put all of these concerns to the SEELB who advised that following an investigation into the allegations raised by the anonymous whistleblower, the board concluded that they do not consider there has been any impropriety by the teacher or the school concerning the teacher's retirement.

Appeals Against Refusal of Admission to Secondary Schools

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of appeals against refusal of admission to secondary schools in each of the last three years, broken down by secondary school.

(AQW 761/11)

Minister of Education: Chuir na Boird Oideachais agus Leabharlann in iúl gur mar seo a leanas a bhí líon na n-achomharc ar iontráil ar iar-bhunscoileanna i ngach bliain le trí bliana anuas. Sa chás go bhfuil * ann in áit an fhigiúir, cuirtear in iúl go raibh níos lú ná cúig chás ann.

The Education and Library Boards have advised that the number of appeals for admission into post-primary schools in each of the last three years, are as detailed in the tables below. Where a figure has been substituted with * it denotes fewer than five cases.

BELFAST EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD

School Name	2008/09 Total Appeals	2009/10 Total Appeals	2010/11 Total Appeals
Aquinas Grammar School	*	5	*
Ashfield Boys School	*	*	*
Ashfield Girls School	5	*	-
Belfast Royal Academy	8	*	*
Bloomfield Collegiate	7	*	5
Campbell College	6	*	—
De La Salle School	*	*	*
Dominican College	*	*	*
Grosvenor Grammar School	6	-	*
Hazelwood Integrated School	-	-	*
Hunterhouse College	11	7	*
Little Flower Girls' School	5	-	-
Methodist College	9	*	*
Rathmore Grammar School	*	*	-
RBAI	5	5	*
St Dominic's College	*	*	*
St Genevieve's High School	*	-	-
St Malachy's College	5	*	*
St Mary's Christian Brothers' Grammar School	-	*	*
Strathearn Grammar School	*	*	-
Victoria College	10	*	7
Wellington College	*	-	*
Total Appeals	105	49	48

WESTERN EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD

School Name	2008/09 Total Appeals	2009/10 Total Appeals	2010/11 Total Appeals
Christian Brothers' Grammar School, Omagh	*	-	*
Collegiate Grammar School, Enniskillen	-	*	*
Drumragh Integrated College	9	7	14
Foyle and Londonderry College	7	-	*
Limavady Grammar School	*	-	-
Loreto Grammar School, Omagh	*	13	-
Lumen Christi College	*	*	*
Mount Lourdes Grammar School	*	6	6
Oakgrove Integrated College	*	5	*
Omagh Academy	*	-	-
St Cecilia's College	10	5	13
St Columb's Grammar School	*	5	*
St Joseph's Boys' School	-	6	*
St Mary's College, Derry	5	6	15
St Michael's College	-	-	5
St Patrick's & St Brigid's College, Claudy	*	-	-
Strabane Grammar School	7	*	*
Thornhill College	7	*	*
Total Appeals	63	67	73

NORTH-EASTERN EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD

School Name	2008/09 Total Appeals	2009/10 Total Appeals	2010/11 Total Appeals
Antrim Grammar School	*	*	-
Ballymena Academy	*	*	*
Ballyclare High School	*	*	*
Ballyclare Secondary School	*	*	*
Belfast High School	*	*	-
Cambridge House Grammar	11	*	*

School Name	2008/09 Total Appeals	2009/10 Total Appeals	2010/11 Total Appeals
Carrickfergus Grammar School	*	*	*
Coleraine Academical Institution	-	-	5
Coleraine High School	*	7	*
Dalriada School	-	*	*
Dominican College, Portstewart	*	*	*
Dunclug College	2	-	6
Larne Grammar School	*	-	*
Loreto College	*	*	*
Rainey Endowed School	5	*	-
Slemish Integrated College	*	*	11
Sperrin Integrated College	*	*	*
St Louis Grammar School	6	6	*
St Mary's Grammar School, Magherafelt	*	*	-
St Patrick's College, Maghera	*	8	-
St Paul's College, Kilrea	*	7	9
St Pius X College	7	*	-
Ulidia Integrated College	*	*	*
Total Appeals	69	60	62

SOUTH-EASTERN EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD

School Name	2008/09 Total Appeals	2009/10 Total Appeals	2010/11 Total Appeals
Assumption Grammar School	8	7	5
Bangor Grammar School	7	-	*
Bangor Academy & Sixth Form College	13	*	9
Down High School	6	*	*
Friends' School	*	*	-
Glastry College	-	*	*
Glenlola Collegiate	5	*	*
Lagan College	27	11	7
Nendrum College	5	*	*

School Name	2008/09 Total Appeals	2009/10 Total Appeals	2010/11 Total Appeals
Our Lady & St Patrick's College	10	5	7
Regent House Grammar School	*	*	*
Saintfield High School	7	-	*
Shimna Integrated College	6	6	*
St Columbanus' College	*	*	*
St Patrick's Grammar School	*	6	10
Strangford Integrated College	6	*	*
Sullivan Upper School	*	*	*
Wallace High School	*	6	*
Total Appeals	109	63	66

SOUTHERN EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD

School Name	2008/09 Total Appeals	2009/10 Total Appeals	2010/11 Total Appeals
Abbey Christian Brothers' Grammar School	12	*	5
Banbridge Academy	5	*	*
Dromore High School	*	-	-
Holy Trinity College	-	5	-
Markethill High School	*	*	-
New-Bridge Integrated College	*	*	5
Our Lady's Grammar School	*	*	*
Royal School, Armagh	*	*	*
Royal School, Dungannon	-	*	*
Sacred Heart Grammar School	*	*	*
St Catherine's College, Armagh	*	*	*
St Ciaran's College	-	-	7
St Colman's College	15	*	11
St Joseph's Grammar School, Donaghmore	9	13	5
St Louis' Grammar School	7	*	*

School Name	2008/09 Total Appeals	2009/10 Total Appeals	2010/11 Total Appeals
St Mark's High School	-	*	-
St Patrick's Academy, Dungannon	17	7	6
St Patrick's Grammar School, Armagh	-	*	10
St Paul's High School, Bessbrook	11	18	22
Total Appeals	93	75	95

Teachers: Additional Employment Rights

Mr W Irwin asked the Minister of Education how many teachers acquired additional employment rights while acting up in a post in each of the last five years, broken down by Education and Library Board area. **(AQW 798/11)**

Minister of Education: Chuir na húdaráis fostaíochta in iúl dom go n-íoctar múinteoirí a théann i mbun post mar Phríomhoide nó mar Leas-Phríomhoide an ráta cuí pá an tráth a théann siad i mbun an phoist agus nach n-éilítear orthu cearta breise fostaíochta agus nach bhfaigheann siad cearta ar an phost buan. Ina theannta sin, cuirtear stop leis an fostaíocht bhreise a fhaightear mar gheall air seo nuair a fhilleann an múinteoir ar ais ina phríomhphost.

I have been advised by the employing authorities that teachers who act up into Principal or Vice principal posts are paid the appropriate rate of pay at the time of acting up and do not acquire additional employment rights nor do they acquire rights to the permanent post. Furthermore, the additional payment received as a result of acting up ceases when the teacher reverts to their substantive post.

When a teacher is temporarily promoted to Principal or Vice Principal they do not accrue any additional pension service credit, however they can accrue increased pension benefits if the temporary promotion is within 10 years of retirement. The Department does not collate this information.

The table below outlines the number of teachers who have acted up into Principal or Vice Principal posts in the last five academic years.

Year	BELB	WELB	NEELB	SEELB	SELB
2005/06	37	59	66	36	73
2006/07	20	43	37	33	51
2007/08	30	39	23	27	34
2008/09	15	19	20	15	22
2009/10	37	46	40	49	61

Single Education System

Mr M Storey asked the Minister of Education for her assessment of the potential benefits and relative cost of a single education system. **(AQW 802/11)**

Minister of Education: Is é polasaí an Choiste Feidhmiúcháin ná go mbeidh córas amháin riaracháin san earnáil oideachais, a thacaíonn le réimse de scoileanna éagsúla. Aithníonn an polasaí gur láidreacht inár gcóras oideachais é go bhfuil réimse de scoileanna éagsúla againn, agus go bhfuil carachtar agus

éiteas ar leith acu. Chomh maith leis sin, léiríonn an polasáí seo rogha na dtuismitheoirí agus rogha na bhfoghlaimeoirí.

The Executive's policy is to have a single system of education administration, supporting a diversity of schools. This policy recognises that the diversity of school types, each with its distinctive character and ethos, is a strength of our education system. It is also a reflection of parental and learner choice.

A single system of administration will save approximately £20 million per year on administration and will provide more effective support for schools. It will also facilitate better planning of the education estate and greater collaboration and sharing among schools, as recommended in the Bain report and the recent Oxford Economics report 'Developing the Case for Shared Education'.

This will ensure equality of access to the curriculum and better use of capital resources, whilst retaining choice for parents and pupils.

First Preference Applications

Mr M Storey asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of first preference applications made to (i) each Education and Library Board; and (ii) each post-primary school for the 2009/10 academic year.

(AQW 804/11)

Minister of Education: Tá líon na n-iarratas prómhrogha a rinneadh chun gach Bord Oideachais agus Leabharlann; agus chun gach iarbhunscoile don bhliain acadúil 2009/10 mar atá mionsonraithe sna táblaí faoi iamh.

The number of first preference applications made to each Education and Library Board; and each post-primary school for the 2009/10 academic year is as detailed in the tables attached.

First preference applications made to each Education and Library Board; and each post-primary school for the 2009/10 academic year.

BELFAST EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD

School Name	Total 1st Preference Applications
Ashfield Girls' High School	119
Ashfield Boys' High School	131
Belfast Model School for Girls	141
Belfast Boys' Model School	127
Orangefield High School	25
St Patrick's College, Bearnageeha	108
St Louise's Comprehensive College	213
Little Flower Girls' School	93
Our Lady of Mercy Girls' School	47
St Rose's High School	53
Christian Brothers' Secondary School	47
St Genevieve's High School	149
St Gemma's High School	15
La Salle Boys' School	190

School Name	Total 1st Preference Applications
Corpus Christi College	74
St Joseph's College	65
Colaiste Feirste	81
Hazelwood College	149
Malone College	80
Grosvenor Grammar School	185
Wellington College	108
Bloomfield Collegiate School	116
Campbell College	117
St Mary's Christian Brothers' Grammar School	169
Methodist College	240
Royal Belfast Academical Institution	156
Belfast Royal Academy	213
St Dominic's High School	143
St Malachy's College	179
Dominican College	168
Strathearn School	129
Rathmore Grammar School	247
Victoria College	129
Hunterhouse College	82
Aquinas Diocesan Grammar School	132
Total	4420

WESTERN EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD

School Name	Total 1st Preference Applications
Castlederg High School	79
Lisnaskea High School	16
Omagh High School	60
Strabane High School	53
Limavady High School	118
Devinish College	60
Lisneal College	143
St Mary's, Limavady	96
St Mary's College, Derry	123

School Name	Total 1st Preference Applications
St Mary's High School, Belleek	23
St Fanchea's College	50
St Joseph's College, Enniskillen	30
St Mary's College, Irvinestown	27
St Eugene's High School, Castlederg	21
St Patrick's & St Brigid's College	97
St Joseph's Secondary School, Derry	135
Dean Maguirc College	69
St Patrick's College, Dungiven	38
St John's Business and Enterprise College	22
St Aidan's High School, Derrylin	23
St Eugene's College, Roslea	27
St Peter's High School, Derry	26
St Cecilia's College, Derry	127
St Comhghall's College	41
St Brigid's College, Derry	95
Immaculate Conception	23
Sacred Heart College, Omagh	101
Holy Cross College, Strabane	227
Oakgrove College	136
Erne Integrated College	58
Drumragh College	122
Collegiate Grammar School, Enniskillen	84
Limavady Grammar School	137
Omagh Academy	104
Strabane Grammar School	71
Mount Lourdes Grammar	133
Portora Royal School	67
St Michael's College, Enniskillen	113
Thornhill College, Derry	215
St Columb's College	243
Christian Brothers' Grammar School, Omagh	133
Loreto Grammar School, Omagh	158
Foyle and Londonderry College	126

School Name	Total 1st Preference Applications
Lumen Christi College	182
Total	4032

NORTH-EASTERN EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD

School Name	Total 1st Preference Applications
Garvagh High School	20
Magherafelt High School	60
Larne High School	66
Carrickfergus College	79
Ballycastle High School	54
Ballymoney High School	87
Ballyclare Secondary School	187
Cullybackey High School	98
Monkstown Community School	118
Glengormley High School	103
Parkhall College	112
Dunclug College	69
Dunluce School	77
Downshire School	116
Ballee Community High School	43
Newtownabbey Community High School	22
Coleraine College	26
St Aloysius' High School, Cushendall	4
St Comgall's High School, Larne	22
Our Lady of Lourdes High School	32
St Patrick's College, Ballymena	58
St Joseph's High School, Coleraine	41
St Colm's High School	76
St Mary's College	34
St Paul's College	59
St Pius X High School	147
Edmund Rice College	99
Cross & Passion College, Ballycastle	120
St Patrick's College, Maghera	213

School Name	Total 1st Preference Applications
St Benedict's College	82
Crumlin Integrated College	42
Slemish College, Ballymena	227
North-Coast Integrated College	62
Ulidia Integrated College	87
Sperrin Integrated College	67
Ballyclare High School	202
Coleraine High School	129
Carrickfergus Grammar School	126
Antrim Grammar School	120
Cambridge House Grammar	183
St Louis' Grammar School, Ballymena	174
Ballymena Academy	161
Dalriada School	184
Coleraine Academical Institution	107
Loreto College	157
Larne Grammar School	100
Rainey Endowed School	115
Dominican College	77
Belfast High School	179
St Mary's Grammar School, Magherafelt	162
St Macnissi's College	87
Total	5345

SOUTH-EASTERN EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD

School Name	Total 1st Preference Applications
Movilla High School	53
The High School, Ballynahinch	46
Nendrum College, Comber	87
Glastry College	105
Lisnagarvey High School	74
Saintfield High School	59
Knockbreda High School	44
Newtownbreda High School	60

School Name	Total 1st Preference Applications
Dunmurry High School	44
Laurelhill Community College	120
Dundonald High School	24
Bangor Academy & Sixth Form	229
St Mary's High School	56
St Columba's High School, Portaferry	25
St Colmcille's High School, Crossgar	70
St Columbanus' College, Bangor	84
St Colman's High School, Ballynahinch	47
St Patrick's High School, Lisburn	52
St Malachy's High School	108
St Colm's High School	107
De La Salle Secondary School, Downpatrick	46
Priory College	65
Fort Hill College	126
Lagan College	269
Shimna Integrated College	106
Strangford Integrated College	120
Blackwater Integrated College	45
Regent House School	235
Down High School	158
Glenlola Collegiate School	166
Bangor Grammar School	123
Sullivan Upper School	178
Friends' School	180
Wallace High School	221
Assumption Grammar School, Ballynahinch	149
St Patrick's Grammar School, Downpatrick	105
Our Lady & St Patrick's College	196
Total	3982

SOUTHERN EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD

School Name	Total 1st Preference Applications
Kilkeel High School	111

School Name	Total 1st Preference Applications
Newtownhamilton High School	39
Clounagh Junior High School	195
Banbridge High School	100
Killicomaine Junior High School	144
Dromore High School	133
Markethill High School	105
Fivemiletown High School	76
City of Armagh High School	22
Rathfriland High School	42
Tandragee Junior High School	73
Aughnacloy College	24
Newry High School	65
Cookstown High School	154
Drumglass High School	57
Lurgan Junior High School	195
St Joseph's Boys' High School, Newry	39
St Columban's College	41
St Mary's High School, Lurgan	141
St Patrick's College, Banbridge	49
St Paul's Junior High School, Lurgan	101
St Mary's High School	59
St Mark's High School	132
St Ciaran's High School	111
St Paul's High School, Bessbrook	263
St Brigid's High School	28
St Joseph's High School, Crossmaglen	82
St Patrick's High School, Keady	143
St Joseph's High School, Coalisland	35
Lismore Comprehensive School	190
St Catherine's College	179
Drumcree College	30
Holy Trinity College	105
St Patrick's College	73
Brownlow College	49

School Name	Total 1st Preference Applications
New-Bridge Integrated College	124
Integrated College Dungannon	49
Banbridge Academy	204
St Louis Grammar School, Kilkeel	92
Abbey Grammar School, Newry	155
Our Lady's Grammar School Newry	126
St Colman's College	142
St Joseph's Convent Grammar School	129
Sacred Heart Grammar School, Newry	129
The Royal School, Dungannon	83
The Royal School, Armagh	105
St Patrick's Grammar School, Armagh	124
St Patrick's Academy, Dungannon	216
Total	5063

Source: Education and Library Boards

Integrated Education

Mr D O'Loan asked the Minister of Education how many children who attended either (i) an integrated primary school; (ii) an integrated secondary school; or (iii) both an integrated primary and secondary school, have proceeded to further and higher education in each of the last ten years, broken down by the college or university attended.

(AQW 811/11)

Minister of Education: Ní choinníonn an Roinn eolas ar cheann scríbe na bpáistí sin a luaíodh ag cuid (i) agus ag cuid (iii) mar nach leantar taifead d'oideachas daltaí ón bhunscoil. I dtaca le cuid (ii) de, ní choinnítear eolas ar an choláiste sonrach nó ar an ollscoil shonrach ar a bhfreastalaíonn na daoine a fhágann an scoil. Tá eolas ar fáil faoi cé acu a chláraigh an fágálach scoile le hinstitiúid i dtuaisceart na hÉireann nó le hinstitiúid in áit éigin eile agus tá an t-eolas sin leagtha amach sa tábla thíos.

The Department does not hold information on the destinations of children identified at parts (i) and (iii) because the pupils have not been tracked from their primary schools. In regard to part (ii) information is not held relating to the specific college or university attended by a school leaver. Information is available on whether the school leaver enrolled at an institution in the North of Ireland or elsewhere and is presented in the table below.

Number of school leavers attending integrated post primary schools with a destination recorded as higher or further education

1998/99 TO 2008/09

	Integrated(1) Post Primary Schools	
	Institutions of higher and further education in the North of Ireland	Other(2) institutions of higher and further education
1998/99	350	41

	Integrated(1) Post Primary Schools	
	Institutions of higher and further education in the North of Ireland	Other(2) institutions of higher and further education
1999/00	463	45
2000/01	536	83
2001/02	681	80
2002/03(3)	Not Available	Not Available
2003/04	838	140
2004/05	856	213
2005/06	828	268
2006/07	900	219
2007/08	1,025	169
2008/09	1,086	175

Source: School Leavers Survey

- 1 Integrated includes both Controlled Integrated and Grant Maintained Integrated schools.
- 2 'Other' category includes institutions outside the North of Ireland and unknown destinations.
- 3 No data are available for the 2002/03 academic year due to difficulties with data collection and validation with schools that year.

Mobile Classrooms

Mr T Lunn asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the number and names of schools currently using mobile classrooms only; (ii) how long each school has been using mobile classrooms; and (iii) what plans she has to resolve this situation.

(AQW 816/11)

Minister of Education: Tá 23 scoil in eastát na scoileanna atá lonnaithe i seomraí ranga soghluaiste amháin faoi láthair.

There are 23 schools in the schools' estate currently located in mobile classrooms only.

School	Sector	Years in mobile accommodation (after recognition for recurrent funding by the Department)
Scoil An Droichid	Irish Medium Primary	2001
Gaelscoil na Speiríní	Irish Medium Primary	2006
Gaelscoil na Móna	Irish medium Primary	2004
Gaelscoil Ghleann Darach	Irish Medium Primary	2007
Gaelscoil na Daróige	Irish Medium Primary	2009
Gaelscoil Éadain Mhóir	Irish Medium Primary	2001
Bunscoil an Traonaigh	Irish medium Primary	2004
Bunscoil Cholmcille Primary	Irish Medium Primary	1997

School	Sector	Years in mobile accommodation (after recognition for recurrent funding by the Department)
Gaelscoil Uí Dhochartaigh Strabane	Irish Medium Primary	2000
Gaelscoil na gCrann	Irish Medium Primary	2006
Bunscoil an Chaistil Primary School	Irish Medium Primary	2003
Scoil Na Fuisseoige	Irish Medium Primary	1997
Bunscoil Bheanna Boirche	Irish Medium Primary	2002
Gaelscoil Uí Néill	Irish Medium Primary	2000
Gaelscoil Éanna	Irish Medium Primary	2007
Omagh Integrated Primary School	Primary School Integrated - Grant Maintained	1994
Roe Valley Integrated Primary School	Primary School Integrated - Grant Maintained	2004
Braidside Integrated Primary School	Primary School Integrated - Grant Maintained	1994
Corran Integrated Primary School	Primary School Integrated - Grant Maintained	1994
The Maine Integrated Primary School	Primary School Integrated - Grant Maintained	2003
Phoenix Integrated Primary School	Primary School Integrated - Grant Maintained	2004
Drumlins Integrated primary	Primary School Integrated - Grant Maintained	2004
Rowandale Integrated Primary	Primary School Integrated - Grant Maintained	2007

No particular timescale is specified for the use of temporary modular accommodation. Whilst the Department would wish to see a decrease in the number of these mobiles, this can only be achieved within the confines of the available financial resources. I will continue to press the case for the much needed capital investment in the schools estate to address the problems faced from the historic underinvestment in the schools estate

Mobile Classrooms

Mr T Lunn asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of pupils who have completed (i) primary education; and (ii) post-primary education while located only in mobile classrooms.
(AQW 817/11)

Minister of Education: Ní choinníonn mo Roinn eolas ar líon na bpáistí a theagascar i seomraí ranga soghluaiste agus bheadh costas díréireach ag baint le hé seo a bhailiú. Bheadh sé dodhéanta, go háirithe in iarbhunscoileanna, a fháil amach cá mhéad páiste a úsáideann na seomraí ranga ag aon am ar leith, rud a bhraitheann ar cén t-ábhar a n-úsáidtear an seomra ranga dó.

My Department does not hold information on the number of children taught in mobile classrooms and to have this collected could only be obtained at a disproportionate cost. In particular in post primary schools it would be impossible to establish how many children use the classrooms at any given time depending on the subject the classroom is used for.

Surplus Land

Dr A McDonnell asked the Minister of Education to detail any (i) land; and (ii) property owned by her Department which is currently deemed surplus to requirements, including the location of the land or property and any plans for its disposal.

(AQW 825/11)

Minister of Education: Níl aon talamh ná aon réadmhaoín ag an Roinn Oideachais a meastar go bhfuil siad iomarcach faoi láthair.

The Department of Education does not own any land or property which is currently deemed surplus to requirements.

Male Teachers

Dr A McDonnell asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 114/11, to list the schools in each Education and Library Board area which do not currently have any male teachers.

(AQW 878/11)

Minister of Education: Tá an t-eolas seo sna táblaí thíos.

The information is contained in the tables below.

LIST OF PRIMARY¹ SCHOOLS WHICH DO NOT CURRENTLY HAVE ANY MALE TEACHERS BELFAST EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD

School Name	Location
Ballysillan Primary School	Belfast
Belmont Primary School	Belfast
Bloomfield Collegiate Prep. Dept.	Belfast
Donegall Road Primary School	Belfast
Dundela Infants School	Belfast
Edenbrooke Primary School	Belfast
Euston Street Primary School	Belfast
Forth River Primary School	Belfast
Greenwood Primary School	Belfast
Grove Primary School	Belfast
Holy Cross Girls' Primary School	Belfast
Knocknagoney Primary School	Belfast
Malvern Primary School	Belfast
St Bernadette's Primary School	Belfast
St John The Baptist Girls' Primary School	Belfast
Star Of The Sea Girls' Primary School	Belfast

School Name	Location
Strathearn School Prep. Dept.	Belfast
Taughmonagh Primary School	Belfast
Victoria College Prep. Dept.	Belfast

WESTERN EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD

School Name	Location
Aghadrumsee Primary School	Enniskillen
Altishane Primary School	Strabane
Artigarvan Primary School	Strabane
Ballougry Primary School	Derry
Belleek Controlled Primary School	Enniskillen
Bready Jubilee Primary School	Strabane
Bridgehill Primary School	Castlederg
Brookeborough Primary School	Enniskillen
Christ The King Primary School	Omagh
Cooley Primary School	Omagh
Cornagague Primary School	Enniskillen
Craigbrack Primary School	Derry
Cumber Claudy Primary School	Derry
Denamona Primary School	Omagh
Derrygonnelly Primary School	Enniskillen
Donemana Primary School	Strabane
Dromore Primary School	Omagh
Drumlegagh Primary School	Omagh
Drumlish Primary School	Omagh
Drumnabey Primary School	Castlederg
Drumrane Primary School	Derry
Envagh Primary School	Omagh
Erganagh Primary School	Castlederg
Evish Primary School	Strabane
Florencecourt Primary School	Enniskillen
Fountain Primary School	Derry
Gaelscoil Na Gcrann	An Ómaigh
Gaelscoil Ui Dhocartaigh	An Srath Bán

School Name	Location
Gillygooley Primary School	Omagh
Gortin Primary School	Omagh
Gortnagarn Primary School	Omagh
Gortnaghey Primary School	Derry
Groarty Integrated Primary School	Derry
Irvinestown Primary School	Enniskillen
Jones Memorial Primary School	Enniskillen
Kesh Primary School	Enniskillen
Killyhommon Primary School	Enniskillen
Lack Primary School	Enniskillen
Langfield Primary School	Omagh
Lisbellaw Primary School	Enniskillen
Loreto Convent Primary School	Omagh
Magilligan Primary School	Limavady
Maguiresbridge Primary School	Enniskillen
Newtownbutler Primary School	Enniskillen
Newtownstewart Model Primary School	Omagh
Queen Elizabeth II Primary School	Omagh
Recarson Primary School	Omagh
Roscavey Primary School	Omagh
St Anthony's Primary School	Limavady
St Brigid's Primary School, Glenelly Road	Omagh
St Brigid's Primary School, Lenagh Road	Omagh
St Caireall's Primary School	Castlederg
St Canice's Primary School, Glenedra Road	Derry
St Davog's Scraghey Primary School	Castlederg
St Dympna's Primary School	Omagh
St Eugene's Primary School	Enniskillen
St Eugene's Primary School	Strabane
St Eugene's Primary School	Omagh
St Finlough's Primary School	Limavady
St John The Baptist Primary School	Enniskillen
St Mary's Girls' Primary School	Strabane
St Mary's Primary School, Kinoughtragh	Enniskillen

School Name	Location
St Matthew's Primary School	Dungannon
St Naile's Primary School	Enniskillen
St Patrick's Primary School	Strabane
St Patrick's Primary School, Tonagh Road	Enniskillen
St Paul's Primary School	Enniskillen
St Peter's & St Paul's Primary School	Derry
St Teresa's Primary School	Omagh

NORTH EASTERN EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD

School Name	Location
Altayeskey Primary School	Magherafelt
Armoy Primary School	Ballymoney
Ballycastle Primary School	Ballycastle
Ballycraigy Primary School	Antrim
Ballyhackett Primary School	Coleraine
Ballymoney Integrated Primary School	Ballymoney
Ballynease Primary School	Ballymena
Ballytober Primary School	Bushmills
Balnamore Primary School	Ballymoney
Barnish Primary School	Ballycastle
Bellaghy Primary School	Magherafelt
Cairncastle Primary School	Larne
Carhill Integrated Primary School	Coleraine
Carnalbanagh Primary School	Ballymena
Carnlough Controlled Integrated Primary School	Ballymena
Castledawson Primary School	Magherafelt
Creavery Primary School	Antrim
Culcrow Primary School	Coleraine
Culnady Primary School	Maghera
Dalriada School Prep. Dept.	Ballymoney
Damhead Primary School	Coleraine
Desertmartin Primary School	Magherafelt
Duneane Primary School	Antrim
Gaelscoil Eanna	Baile Nua na Mainistreach

School Name	Location
Gaelscoil Na Chastil	Baile an Chaistil
Gaelscoil Na Speirini	Machaire Fíolta
Garryduff Primary School	Ballymoney
Glynn Primary School	Larne
Gorran Primary School	Coleraine
Harryville Primary School	Ballymena
Hazelbank Primary School	Ballymena
Kilbride Primary School	Ballyclare
Kilcoan Primary School	Larne
Killowen Primary School	Coleraine
Kilmoyle Primary School	Ballymoney
Kilross Primary School	Magherafelt
Kirkinriola Primary School	Ballymena
Landhead Primary School	Ballymoney
Longstone Primary School	Ballymena
Lourdes Primary School	Carrickfergus
Maine Integrated Primary School	Randalstown
Mallusk Primary School	Newtownabbey
Moneynick Primary School	Antrim
Moorfields Primary School	Ballymena
Mullaghduh Primary School	Larne
Parkgate Primary School	Ballyclare
Rasharkin Primary School	Ballymena
Rathenraw Integrated Primary School	Antrim
Silverstream Primary School	Carrickfergus
St Brigid's Primary School Tirkane	Maghera
St Ciaran's Primary School	Ballymena
St Columba's Primary School, Boleran Road	Coleraine
St Columb's Primary School (Cullion)	Magherafelt
St Joseph's Primary School	Antrim
St Macnisiús' Primary School	Antrim
St Mary's Primary School	Ballycastle
St Mary's Primary School, Ballymena Road	Ballymena
St Olcan's Primary School	Ballymoney

School Name	Location
St Paul's Primary School	Ballymena
Straidbilly Primary School	Ballymoney
Straidhavern Primary School	Crumlin
The Wm Pinkerton Memorial Primary School	Ballymoney
Thompson Primary School	Ballyclare
Tildarg Primary School	Ballyclare
Tir-Na-Nog Primary School	Ballyclare
Toreagh Primary School	Larne
Upper Ballyboley Primary School	Ballyclare
Woodburn Primary School	Carrickfergus

SOUTH EASTERN EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD

School Name	Location
Alexander Dickson Primary School	Newtownards
Ballycloughan Primary School	Saintfield
Ballykeigle Primary School	Newtownards
Ballyvester Primary School	Donaghadee
Ballywalter Primary School	Newtownards
Carr Primary School	Lisburn
Carrickmannon Primary School	Newtownards
Cedar Integrated Primary School	Crossgar
Cumran Primary School	Downpatrick
Down High School Prep. Dept.	Downpatrick
Dunmurry Primary School	Belfast
Friends School Prep. Dept.	Lisburn
Glenlola Collegiate Prep. Dept.	Bangor
Hollywood Primary School	Hollywood
Killyleagh Primary School	Downpatrick
Lead Hill Primary School	Belfast
Newcastle Primary School	Newcastle
Redburn Primary School	Hollywood
Regent House School Prep. Dept.	Newtownards
St Caolan's Primary School	Ballynahinch
St Joseph's Primary School, Ballycruttle Road	Downpatrick

School Name	Location
St Macartan's Primary School	Downpatrick
St Malachy's Primary School	Newry
St Mary's Primary School	Saintfield
Tonagh Primary School	Lisburn
Victoria Primary School (Ballyhalbert)	Newtownards

SOUTHERN EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD

School Name	Location
Aghavilly Primary School	Armagh
Anamar Primary School	Newry
Augher Central Primary School	Augher
Ballylifford Primary School	Cookstown
Ballytrea Primary School	Dungannon
Birches Primary School	Craigavon
Bleary Primary School	Craigavon
Blessed Patrick O'loughran Primary School	Dungannon
Bush Primary School	Dungannon
Carntall Primary School	Clogher
Churchill Primary School	Caledon
Churchtown Primary School	Cookstown
Clare Primary School	Tandragee
Clea Primary School	Keady
Clogher Regional Primary School	Clogher
Clontifleece Primary School	Warrenpoint
Coagh Primary School	Cookstown
Cortamlet Primary School	Newry
Craigavon Primary School	Craigavon
Derrylatinee Primary School	Dungannon
Donaghey Primary School	Dungannon
Donaghmore Primary School	Dungannon
Dromore Road Primary School	Warrenpoint
Drumsallen Primary School	Armagh
Dungannon Primary School	Dungannon
Hamiltonsbawn Primary School	Armagh

School Name	Location
Keady Primary School	Armagh
Kilbroney Integrated Primary School	Newry
Killeen Primary School	Newry
Killyman Primary School	Dungannon
Laghey Primary School	Dungannon
Lisferty Primary School	Dungannon
Lisnadill Primary School	Armagh
Milltown Primary School	Banbridge
Moneydarragh Primary School	Newry
Mount St Catherine's Primary School	Armagh
Mounthorris Primary School	Armagh
Moy Regional Primary School	Dungannon
Mullaghglass Primary School	Newry
Mullavilly Primary School	Tandragee
Newmills Primary School	Dungannon
Poyntzpass Primary School	Poyntzpass
Queen Elizabeth II (Pomeroy) Primary School	Dungannon
Richmond Primary School	Dungannon
Royal School Prep. Dept.	Armagh
St Brigid's (Drumilly) Primary School	Belleek
St Brigid's Primary School	Augher
St Clare's Convent Primary School	Newry
St John's Eglis Primary School	Craigavon
St John's Primary School	Newry
St Joseph's Primary School	Caledon
St Laurence O'toole's Primary School	Belleek
St Macartan's Primary School	Clogher
St Malachy's Primary School	Magherafelt
St Mary's Primary School	Cookstown
St Mary's Primary School	Fivemiletown
St Patrick's Primary School	Magherafelt
St Patrick's Primary School, Ballymacbredan Road	Craigavon
St Patrick's Primary School, Longstone Road	Newry
St Patrick's Primary School, Mullanahoe Road	Dungannon

School Name	Location
The Drelincourt Infants School	Armagh
Woods Primary School	Magherafelt

Source: Teacher Payroll and Pensions Administration System

Note:

1. Includes preparatory departments of grammar schools.

Foyle and Londonderry College at Clooney

Mr M Durkan asked the Minister of Education for an update on the provision of a new build for Foyle and Londonderry College at Clooney.

(AQW 908/11)

Minister of Education: Tá an tionscadal le scoil nua a thógáil do Foyle & Londonderry College ar an suíomh ag Cluanaidh ag luathchéim den phleanáil. Fuair mo Roinn aighneacht Chéim C (pleananna tosaigh léaráide agus costais) ar 23 Meán Fómhair 2010.

The project to build a new school for Foyle & Londonderry College on the Clooney site is at an early stage of planning. The Stage C submission (initial sketch plans and costs) was received in my Department on 23 September 2010.

The project remains on my Department's Investment Delivery Plan however the timing as to when it might be taken forward can only be considered when the capital budget for the coming years has been determined.

I will of course continue to press the case for significant capital funds for the schools estate.

Primary School Teachers

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 114/11, to list the name and address of each of the 244 schools who do not employ any male teachers, broken down by constituency; and to state whether each school teaches all male, all female or mixed gender pupils.

(AQW 909/11)

Minister of Education: Tá sé socraithe agam go gcuirfean an t-eolas a iarradh sa Leabharlann.

I have arranged to have the information requested placed in the Library.

Schools: South Antrim

Mr P Girvan asked the Minister of Education how much has been spent on the maintenance of schools in the South Antrim area over the last three years.

(AQO 199/11)

Minister of Education: Is eol dom go maith an tábhacht a bhaineann lena chinntiú go gcothabháiltear an t-eastát scoile go hiomchuí le stop a chur le meath do-ghlactha na bhfoirgneamh agus lena chinntiú go bhfuil timpeallacht foghlama ag daoine óga agus ag múinteoir atá oiriúnach don fheidhm.

I am acutely aware of the importance of ensuring that the schools' estate is appropriately maintained to prevent unacceptable deterioration of the buildings and to ensure our young people and teachers have a learning environment that is kept fit for purpose.

I have continually highlighted the need for the investment in our schools estate to be prioritised and protected and also that significant investment is needed in our schools' estate to tackle the high levels of maintenance backlog.

In the last 3 years I have provided over £80 million for school maintenance. In addition, I have allocated an extra £12.9m for maintenance in 2010/11.

The maintenance expenditure on the schools in the South Antrim area is £4.2m from 2007/08 to 2009/10 and the backlog for this area is currently £10.9m.

Equality and All-Ireland Directorate

Mr R McCartney asked the Minister of Education to outline the work of the Equality and All Ireland Directorate to date.

(AQO 201/11)

Minister of Education: Tá m'fhís don chóras oideachais bunaithe ar phrionsabal an chomhionannais deise do gach páiste agus do gach duine óg.

My vision for our education system is founded on the principle of equality of opportunity for all children and young people. A system in which every school is a good school; and no child is denied the opportunity to succeed.

To achieve that, the principle of equality must be the thread running through every aspect of my Department: its vision and values; in policies – such as ending academic selection, encouraging and facilitating Irish-medium and integrated education; meeting additional educational needs. It should also be reflected in the allocation of resources; and in the reform of education administration.

Alongside that, I aim to strengthen and deepen north-south co-operation on policy development and delivery, recognising the common educational challenges that face young people north and south; and our shared interest in equipping our young people to secure their future; and to fuel and drive our economy.

My Department's Equality and All Ireland Directorate provides a specific focus for this. The Directorate ensures that equality considerations are paramount within the work of all the other directorates, exercising a challenge and co-ordination role that spans all of the Department's functions.

Schools: Community Use

Mr D McNarry asked the Minister of Education whether she will publish the report on enhancing the community use of school premises produced by the Working Group of key educational stakeholders.

(AQO 202/11)

Minister of Education: Chuir mé an grúpa oibre ar bun le go bhféadfadh an Roinn moltaí a fháil ar an bhealach is fearr le húsáid áitreabh scoileanna a mhéadú (taobh amuigh d'uaireanta scoile) do dhaltaí, dá gcuid teaghlach agus don phobal i gcoitinne.

I established the working group so that the Department could receive suggestions and recommendations on how best to increase the use (outside of school hours) of school premises by pupils, their families and the wider communities. The suggestions and recommendations contained in the report are intended for DE and ESA to inform policy and operations in relation to enhancing community use of school premises.

The Working Group has provided the department with its report and my officials have been analysing the recommendations to establish any resource, legal or legislative implications of the recommendations. There are a number of recommendations which directly impact upon the statutory functions of other government departments and public bodies and given the range of issues identified a view from each department is required on the suitability of the recommendations. This exercise is ongoing. When I have had the opportunity to consider all responses I will bring forward guidance for schools.

It may not be possible or practical to implement all the recommendations made by the Working Group. However for future reference, there would be merit in sharing the recommendations more widely and I will, therefore, publish the report alongside the new guidance for schools.

Dyslexia: Educational Support

Mr B McElduff asked the Minister of Education what educational support services are available for children with dyslexia.

(AQO 203/11)

Minister of Education: Tá tugtha le fios ag Príomhfheidhmeannaigh na mBord Oideachais agus Leabharlann dom go bhfuil réimse seirbhísí tacaíochta oideachais agus soláthair oideachais ar fáil do thuismitheoirí agus do scoileanna le haghaidh páiste ar aithníodh a raibh disléicse air nó uirthi.

I have been advised by the Chief Executives of the Education and Library Boards that a range of educational support services and provision is available to parents and schools for a child identified with dyslexia. These include:

- dyslexia awareness training to schools (and parents) tailored to enhance the capacity of teachers to identify and respond appropriately in addressing dyslexia;
- a range of strategies, resources and computer assisted programmes available to pupils with dyslexia for whom more traditional methods are unsuccessful;
- personalised teaching and support for individual pupils may also be provided for certain pupils from specialist teachers;
- all Educational Psychologists are trained and skilled in the assessment and identification of dyslexia. The Educational Psychologists provide a comprehensive range of support including recommendations and resources to parents and schools to assist the pupil achieve his/her potential;
- a range of publications and resources, developed by the Boards' Peripatetic Services, including phonics and spelling programmes is also available; and
- Special Access Arrangements for examinations, including where appropriate, provision of extra time, readers and scribes.

When children who are thought to have dyslexia are put forward for assessment at Stage 3 of the Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs, they are either screened for additional Board support by psychology assistants or educational psychologistS. They use a large battery of cognitive and attainment tests in the identification of dyslexia. Agreed five-Board criteria for additional Stage 3 and Stage 5 support are applied in each case;

Some schools have achieved or are working towards achievement of Dyslexia Friendly status usually in association with the British Dyslexia Association. Schools are supported by the Board services in achieving this award;

Furthermore from 2004/05 to 2007/08, the Department of Education provided an additional £2m to the five ELBS to provide training for teachers in identification techniques relating to dyslexia;

DE has also been involved in producing classroom resources to support positive interventions. A complementary video, CD-ROM and DVDROM on Dyslexia, produced by a joint working group from DE and the Department for Education and Skills in Dublin, and a guide for teachers "Developing a Dyslexia Friendly Learning Environment", have been distributed to all schools in the North.

Transfer 2010

Mr C McDevitt asked the Minister of Education for her assessment of the effectiveness of Transfer 2010.
(AQO 204/11)

Minister of Education: Tá mé tiomanta comhionannas a chur i gcoírlár na n-athchóirithe san earnáil oideachais. Tá Aistriú 2010 agus athchóirithe eile san earnáil oideachais mar chuid de phróiseas leanúnach athraithe a mbeidh córas oideachais bunaithe ar an chomhionannas, ar dheis agus ar an sármhaitheas de thoradh air.

I am committed to putting equality at the centre of education reforms. Transfer 2010 and other education reforms are part of an ongoing transformation process that will result in an education system founded on equality, opportunity and excellence.

152 out of 219 post-primary schools (69%) followed my Department's Transfer 2010 advice not to use academic selection. I commend any school that moves away from a failed system of academic selection and my Department will continue to do all in its power to facilitate progressive change of this nature. Schools using breakaway tests must face up to their responsibility to play a full and willing part in meeting the needs of all children in our community, not just the academically gifted and able.

I am determined to continue reforming our education system, ending academic selection and rejection of our children, and putting equality at the core of my Department's policies.

The delivery of the revised curriculum in our primary schools is a success. It must not be distorted by the actions of a minority of schools using breakaway tests. Primary principals and their trade union representatives should be commended for their support in ensuring this does not happen.

My Department's policy on post-primary transfer from September 2010, covering Transfer 2011 and beyond, was published on 5 July 2010.

Interim operational guidance on Transfer 2011 issued to schools on 16 September 2010 and further detailed guidance will issue shortly.

Literacy and Numeracy Strategy

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister of Education when she will bring forward the revised Literacy and Numeracy Strategy.

(AQO 205/11)

Minister of Education: Beidh mé ag foilsiú na straitéise athbhreithnithe um litearthacht agus uimhearthacht ar ball sna seachtainí atá romhainn. Tá mé ag súil go mór le tacaíocht na gComhaltaí ar an doiciméad tábhachtach seo.

I will publish the revised literacy and numeracy strategy in the coming weeks. I look forward to Members' support for this important document.

The strategy aims to ensure that more of our young people leave school with good levels of literacy and numeracy. Along with my wider reforms aimed at raising standards, the strategy will make a key contribution to the development of our economy.

School Admissions: Bangor Academy

Mr B Wilson asked the Minister of Education how many children from Bangor were unable to obtain a place at Bangor Academy under Transfer 2010; and where these children finally obtained a place.

(AQO 206/11)

Minister of Education: Bhí tríocha páiste as Beannchar nach raibh ábalta áit a fháil in Bangor Academy and Sixth Form College faoi Aistriú 2010. Fuair na páistí sin áiteanna i scoileanna eile mar seo a leanas:

Thirty children from Bangor were unable to obtain a place at Bangor Academy and Sixth Form College under Transfer 2010. These children went on to be placed as follows:

Movilla High School	St Columbanus' College	Priory College	Strangford College	Glenlola Collegiate	Malone College
6	5	14	3	1	1

Source: South Eastern Education and Library Board

Budget

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Education whether she has instructed her officials to identify areas of her budget in which savings could be found.

(AQO 207/11)

Minister of Education: The creation of the Education and Skills Authority as part of the Review of Public Administration would also release significant savings in administration and management costs each year for directing to front-line service delivery and improving educational standards.

Déanann mo chuid feidhmeannach grinnmhonatóireacht ar an chaiteachas ar fad ar bhonn leanúnach lena chinntiú go bhfaigheann an Roinn an luach is fearr agus an tairbhe is mó ó na hacmhainní ar fad a úsáideann siad.

My officials monitor closely all expenditure on an ongoing basis to ensure that the Department secures best value and maximum benefit for all the resources it deploys. As part of that work, officials also look to identify potential efficiencies and savings which would help ease pressures on the budget, so that the department's priorities continue to be delivered and front-line services protected as far as possible.

Special Educational Needs and Inclusion

Ms M Ritchie asked the Minister of Education when she will publish the responses to the consultation on Special Educational Needs and Inclusion.

(AQO 208/11)

Minister of Education: Tá mionanailís leanúnach á déanamh ag an Roinn ar an iliomad freagraí a fuarthas mar chuid den chomhairliúchán ar Gach Scoil ina Scoil Mhaith: An Bealach Chun Tosaigh do Riachtanais Speisialta Oideachais agus Chuimsiú.

The Department is carrying out an ongoing detailed analysis of the many responses received following consultation on Every School a Good School: The Way Forward for Special Educational Needs and Inclusion.

It is intended that a factual summary of these responses will be published for access by all stakeholders later this year.

Department for Employment and Learning

New Campus in Coleraine

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on the provision of a new campus in Coleraine for the Northern Regional College.

(AQW 716/11)

Minister for Employment and Learning (Sir Reg Empey): A Strategic Outline Case, jointly prepared and submitted to my Department by the Northern and Southern Regional Colleges, includes a recommendation to replace the existing campuses at Coleraine and Ballymoney with a new build in Coleraine. The Strategic Outline Case is currently being considered by the Department and a bid for the related funding has been made in the Comprehensive Spending Review and the Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland version 3.

McGurk and Moore

Ms M Anderson asked the Minister for Employment and Learning (i) for his assessment of the future of jobs for the 32 workers at the property maintenance company, McGurk and Moore, following the recent loss of a contract to Omega; (ii) whether TUPE legislation will apply in this case; and (iii) whether he will seek a resolution to the dispute between these two rival companies.

(AQW 951/11)

Minister for Employment and Learning: I am not in a position to comment on the future of jobs for the workers at McGurk and Moore, since that is an employment matter between that company and the contractor Omega. While the Department for Employment and Learning has responsibility for the development and establishment of the framework of employment law in Northern Ireland, it cannot provide advice on, or intervene in, individual employment law matters, such as ascertaining whether TUPE applies in individual cases, or carrying out the type of dispute resolution that you have requested.

However, should it arise that workers are made redundant, then the Department can provide information and advice, to help them find alternative employment or improve their skills through the Department's employment, training and further education programmes. Employment Service officials work in partnership with a variety of organisations, to offer a wide range of services to workers affected by redundancy.

For further information and independent advice on Northern Ireland employment law matters, including conciliation, those involved may wish to contact the Labour Relations Agency:

Labour Relations Agency
2-8 Gordon Street
Belfast
BT1 2LG

Tel: (028) 9032 1442

Further information is available on business transfers and TUPE on the <http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/> website.

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

HMRC

Mr B McElduff asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether she can liaise with HMRC to ensure greater accessibility for local companies to renegotiate payment schedules and terms and conditions during the current economic downturn.

(AQW 475/11)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mrs A Foster): I have written on a number of occasions to HMRC to intervene on behalf of Invest NI Client Companies experiencing difficulties in meeting their payment obligations due to short term cash flow problems; and HMRC has responded positively.

My policy officials have had contact with HMRC in the past in relation to initiatives they are taking to improve their services to business in Northern Ireland. These contacts will be maintained.

HMRC is also a member of the Better Regulation Stakeholders Forum, chaired by my Department.

Northern Ireland Tourist Board

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment why the Northern Ireland Tourist Board has not engaged with local companies in relation to ground handling at cruise ships, in order to benefit and boost the local economy.

(AQW 601/11)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) welcomes engagement with all organisations with an interest in tourism and the local economy and offers a comprehensive industry development programme and an extensive range of industry communications and publications.

Local authorities across Northern Ireland liaise directly with the organisations which own and operate the cruise liners. In Belfast this relationship is managed by the Belfast Visitor & Convention Bureau (BVCB) and in Londonderry by the Derry Visitor & Convention Bureau (DVCB). NITB does not engage

directly with individual organisations operating cruise liners. Cruise liners select the ground handler(s) that they wish to work with based on their own commercial needs.

Northern Ireland Tourist Board

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline (i) the support the Northern Ireland Tourist Board provides to local ground handlers of cruise ships; and (ii) whether the Northern Ireland Tourist Board has encouraged the use of local ground handlers.

(AQW 602/11)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:

- (i) The Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) does not provide a specific programme of support for ground handlers. Local ground handling companies are encouraged to competitively apply for support according to the established criteria through the Tourism Development Scheme (TDS) or Tourism Innovation Fund (TIF). Although, both are currently closed to applications.
- (ii) NITB has no remit to encourage the use of a local ground handling company by a cruise liner. The cruise liner will select the ground handler(s) that they wish to work with based on their own commercial needs. In addition local authorities across Northern Ireland liaise directly with the organisations which own and operate the cruise liners. In Belfast this relationship is managed by Belfast Visitor & Convention Bureau (BVCB) and in Londonderry by Derry Visitor & Convention Bureau (DVCB).

Brown Tourist Signs

Mr D Kinahan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what discussions she has had with the Minister of the Environment on the potential for relaxing the planning rules to which brown signs are subject, with particular reference to brown tourist signs highlighting Springhill and Sentry Hill in Co. Antrim.

(AQW 637/11)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: As Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment I have had no discussions with the Minister of the Environment Edwin Poots MLA, or his predecessor Sammy Wilson MP MLA regarding the Tourist Signing in Northern Ireland Policy.

The Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) and Road Service, the Executive Agency within the Department of Regional Development (DRD), operate the joint policy in relation to the provision of white-on-brown tourist signs in Northern Ireland. A full copy of the policy and operating procedures is available on www.nitb.com. The general principles and purpose of tourist signing is to assist in the management of traffic and to ensure the safe operation of the road network. It is not intended that signs be used as advertising for the tourist destination.

It is the Northern Ireland Tourist Boards understanding that white on brown signs provide directional signage to both Springhill and Sentry Hill attractions.

I have recently asked officials from my department and the Northern Ireland Tourist Board to request a meeting with DRD to carefully examine and review the current policy.

Renewable Energy

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the schemes her Department provides or intends to provide to increase the usage of renewable energy.

(AQW 685/11)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The Northern Ireland Renewables Obligation (NIRO) is government's main mechanism for incentivising renewable electricity generation in Northern Ireland. In March 2010 I amended the NIRO to provide greater levels of incentive to generators using wind, hydro and solar photovoltaic technologies and my Department is currently consulting on further changes to increase the incentivisation for electricity generated from anaerobic digestion.

My Department has just completed a study into options for future incentivisation of renewable electricity in Northern Ireland. The Department must take account of (a) the impact of subsidies on electricity bills and (b) the ability of any particular incentive mechanism to deliver Northern Ireland's overall target of 40% electricity from renewable generation by 2020. An announcement was planned for 2010, however this will now have to wait until the Coalition Government has a settled way forward on incentivising electricity in Britain.

My Department will shortly begin work on a full economic analysis of a Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) for Northern Ireland, with a view to introducing such a scheme providing it proves economically viable to do so.

Invest NI funds a number of programmes in Northern Ireland which support the identification and deployment of resource-efficient measures in industry. These programmes include the Carbon Trust which helps businesses to reduce energy consumption through the provision of direct one to one advice and information, training, free literature, technical seminars and a free helpline. Carbon Trust also manages an interest free loan fund and it is through this that it can accelerate the deployment of energy efficient and/or renewable energy technologies in industry, where it is economic to do so.

The Carbon Trust Loan Fund offers an interest free loan of up to £100k to assist businesses to install energy efficient or renewable energy technologies. The Loan Fund is a revolving loan fund with £8.3 million having been invested by Invest NI to date.

Invest NI also offers consultancy support to SME client companies to scope or implement material or energy saving projects and is especially targeted at those which are risk averse and/or do not have the technical capability to take projects forward. Its overall aim is to encourage client businesses to move from awareness of resource efficiency issues into action. Site visits and advice and information on sustainable energy including renewable energy, solutions are also available from in-house experts where this is appropriate.

Surplus Land

Dr A McDonnell asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail any (i) land; and (ii) property owned by her Department which is currently deemed surplus to requirements, including the location of the land or property and any plans for its disposal.

(AQW 826/11)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The Department owns no land or property which is deemed surplus to requirements.

Employment: Renewable Energy

Mr S Moutray asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline what Invest NI is doing to encourage jobs in the renewable energy sector.

(AQO 230/11)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Northern Ireland is well placed to exploit the opportunities arising within the renewable sector by virtue of its strong knowledge base, skilled engineering capability and favorable geographical location.

Invest NI has designated resources to identify business opportunities in the sector and build awareness of these within local industry.

For example, it has developing profiles of more than 400 companies with capability in the sector and these will be marketed at relevant events.

Support has been provided for companies to attend and exhibit at a number of key events, including the All Energy event in Aberdeen in May 2010. Estimated sales of almost £16 million over the next 36 months have been projected as a result of the contacts made by local companies.

Also, since April 2009, Invest NI clients in the sector have received financial assistance of £5.2 million leveraging total investment costs of £25.6 million.

Tourism: GB Visitors

Lord Browne asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the annual decrease in the number of visitors from Great Britain to Northern Ireland since 2004.

(AQO 231/11)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The annual decrease in visitor numbers from GB must be seen in the context of the overall outbound market from Great Britain where there was almost no growth in British holiday trips to Europe between 2005 and 2008. In 2009, the global economic recession and a decline in consumer confidence contributed further to the decline.

However latest preliminary figures for June 2010, indicate that the GB market to Northern Ireland may be beginning to turn around with 15 % growth in trips compared to June 2009. Tourism Ireland is committed to working intensively with this market to ensure return to growth.

Cross-border Projects

Mrs M Bradley asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what action her Department is taking to encourage cross-border projects in the North West, harnessing the potential of Project Kelvin.

(AQO 232/11)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Officials from my Department have been actively engaged with representatives of the North West Region Cross Border Group to provide feedback on a proposed project to seek Interreg IVA funding to utilise the international connectivity resulting from Project Kelvin.

Project Kelvin is a significant part of our world class telecommunications infrastructure. In order to ensure that we exploit this infrastructure fully, I have asked the MATRIX Panel to conduct a study into market opportunities arising as result of that infrastructure. The report will be available shortly.

Broadband

Mr J Craig asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on the multi-million pound investment to improve broadband speed for businesses in urban and rural areas; and what will be the minimum speed available.

(AQO 233/11)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The investment roll-out is progressing well and remains on track for completion by May 2011. The contract will deliver a minimum of 2 Megabytes per second to businesses across Northern Ireland. However some businesses located close to the upgraded access points could experience speeds in excess of 30 Megabytes.

Tourism Development Scheme

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment when the next Northern Ireland Tourist Board Tourism Development Scheme will be available, in view of the considerable interest from the private sector in tourism areas such as Ards.

(AQO 234/11)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The Northern Ireland Tourist Board's recent calls for applications under the Tourism Development Scheme 2006 to 2008 and 2008 to 2011 have been significantly oversubscribed and in total offers of financial assistance were made to 42 projects committing over seven million pounds of capital support.

The Northern Ireland Tourist Board recognizes the importance of continued capital support for the tourism sector. However, it will not be possible to launch a further round until the outcome of the Executive's Budget process is known.

Programme for Government: Targets

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment of her assessment of whether the Programme for Government targets PSA 1 and PSA 3 will be met.

(AQO 235/11)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: My department leads on the improving productivity Public Service Agreement, PSA 1, in the Executive's Programme for Government.

In terms of the measures to improve PSA 1, the latest update indicates that over 60% are on target for delivery, with a number already achieved, or in some cases even exceeded.

However, as the Programme for Government recognises, the PSA targets were first set in a different global economic climate and this explains the shortfall in performance for some targets, particularly those relating to exports and jobs promoted.

My department continues to be focused on maximising the level of achievement on all the PSA indicators it has responsibility for.

In addition, my department is accountable for 6 of the targets which feed into the increasing employment PSA, although the Department for Employment and Learning has overall responsibility for this PSA.

Northern Ireland Electricity

Mr B Armstrong asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what discussions she has had with her Executive colleagues concerning the proposed sale of Northern Ireland Electricity's transmission and distribution network to the Electricity Supply Board.

(AQO 236/11)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: I have had informal discussions with various Executive colleagues, including the First Minister.

Green Deal

Mr R Beggs asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline the opportunities presented by the 'Green Deal' launched by the Department of Energy and Climate Change.

(AQO 237/11)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The Department of Energy and Climate Change, DECC, offers substantial opportunities to retrofit energy efficiency in a significant number of domestic and non domestic buildings, create new jobs, whilst also reducing energy bills and carbon emissions. Financing will be provided by the private sector through the establishment of Green Deal providers.

Job creation potential exists for suppliers and installers of energy efficient products and the corresponding supply chain.

The DECC Green Deal, which has yet to be publically consulted on, applies to GB only; similar consultation and legislative changes would be needed here to implement such a scheme.

It is also worth noting that the Green New Deal Group for Northern Ireland is developing a proposal for a pilot scheme for the Barcroft/Loanda area of Newry Low Carbon City Zone.

Northern Ireland Electricity

Ms M Anderson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline her discussions with the Irish Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources in relation to the proposed sale of Northern Ireland Electricity to the Electricity Supply Board, including any assurances she has received about the Electricity Supply Board's investment plans.

(AQO 238/11)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: I have met with the Irish Energy Minister Eamon Ryan TD, and senior representatives from NIE and ESB, in relation to the planned transaction, and have obtained assurances on a range of issues. These include the importance of maintaining existing NIE jobs, that NIE will continue to be operated as a separate entity in Northern Ireland and that there will be local representation on the ESB Board.

ESB has also given assurances of their commitment to fund future investment in the Northern Ireland electricity network to ensure that renewable energy targets, in particular, are met.

The Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation will be undertaking a consultation on any new licence conditions and this will consider a range of issues, including those relating to capital investment.

Department of the Environment

General Grant

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of the Environment to explain how the de-rating element of the general grant to local councils is calculated.

(AQW 603/11)

Minister of the Environment (Mr E Poots): A statutory de-rating formula allows for the calculation of district rates income lost to councils as a result of DFP de-rating policy. The policy supports the following rate reductions:-

- Sport and Recreation property (currently 80 per cent derated)
- Industrial property (currently 70 per cent derated)
- Freight and Transport property (75 per cent derated)

The relevant de-rated percentage of a property valuation is divided by 100 to create a de-rated penny product and is then multiplied by a council's non-domestic rate to calculate the de-rating grant entitlement. The Department of the Environment then compensates the council for the loss of income arising from the DFP policy.

General Grant

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of the Environment to detail how the resource element of the general grant to local councils is calculated.

(AQW 629/11)

Minister of the Environment: The resources element of the general grant is calculated in accordance with the statutory formula detailed in The Local Government (General Grant) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003.

The formula is designed to measure the wealth base against the needs of each council. The Grant is paid only to those councils whose needs exceed their wealth. Wealth is determined by the value of property in the district and needs by an adjusted population. Built into the formula for the adjusted population are factors to address socio-economic disadvantage; the impact of an influx of population into a district; and sparsity. The overall monies available for this element of the General Grant is then shared out in proportion to the need as identified by the formula.

Waste Exemption Certificates

Mr D Kinahan asked the Minister of the Environment whether he will address the anomaly that allows sites without planning permission to receive waste exemption certificates.

(AQW 643/11)

Minister of the Environment: Waste Management Licensing Regulations specify a wide range of licensing exemptions. While some of these exemptions specify the requirement to have a relevant planning permission, where this is required, there are a large number which do not specify the need for planning permission.

I accept and support the principle that, where it is required, planning permission should be secured before waste exemption certificates are granted. In this context, the Department has developed a work programme to examine waste management licensing exemptions, and assess the need for change. As individual exemptions are reviewed and amended where necessary, the issue of planning permission is being addressed.

However in instances where planning permission is required but has not been sought or granted, Planning Service already has the option of taking enforcement action to address the position.

Councils Tendered for Banking Services

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of the Environment how many councils have tendered for banking services to date; and when did each council last tender for this service.

(AQW 646/11)

Minister of the Environment: The information is not held centrally by my Department but is available from any individual council in which you have an interest.

I expect all councils, when tendering for a banking service or any other service, to seek out the most economically advantageous provider.

Land Disposal

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of the Environment what method for land disposal does the Local Government Auditor recommend to local councils; and to list the councils which currently use this method.

(AQW 647/11)

Minister of the Environment: I can advise that the onus is on individual councils to adopt procedures whereby best value for ratepayers is obtained with regard to the disposal of land. If a council is minded to dispose of land at less than best price, or for the best rent or otherwise on the best terms that can reasonably be obtained, the council can approach my Department for approval under section 96(5) of the Local Government Act (NI) 1972.

I am aware that Land & Property Services has produced guidance in relation to the disposal of land and my department has recommended this to councils in drawing up their own procedures.

NI Water: Sewage Pollution

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (i) the number of incidents of sewage pollution attributable to NI Water which have occurred in rivers and watercourses in the Strangford constituency, in each of the last three years; and (ii) the cost of these incidents.

(AQW 735/11)

Minister of the Environment: The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) is responsible for investigating reports of pollution affecting ground or surface waters and for initiating enforcement action, where appropriate, under the terms of the Water (Northern Ireland) Order 1999.

Table A indicates the number of incidents of sewage pollution attributable to Northern Ireland Water (NIW) which have occurred in rivers and watercourses in the Strangford constituency in each of the last three years.

TABLE A

Year	2007	2008	2009	Total
Total Number	50	23	39	112

Table B indicates the estimated investigation cost of sewage pollution incidents attributable to NIW in each of the last three years.

TABLE B

Year	No Incidents	Cost of incidents per year
2007	50	£ 5544
2008	23	£ 2550
2009	39	£ 4324
Total	112	£ 12,418

Houses in Multiple Occupation

Dr A McDonnell asked the Minister of the Environment, in relation to houses in multiple occupation in each electoral ward, to detail (i) the current total number; (ii) the percentage; (iii) the cap implemented; (iv) how her Department decided the individual percentage limits; (v) the procedure followed for consultation with the local community; and (vi) what communities were consulted.

(AQW 737/11)

Minister of the Environment: I would refer Dr McDonnell to a similar question that he asked in May last year in respect of the HMO Subject Plan for Belfast. The reply to this question addresses the first 4 points raised by Dr McDonnell (see response to AQW 7400/09). I will now deal with the two additional points that have been raised relating to consultation procedure and information on which communities were consulted.

The preparation of the Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) Subject Plan for Belfast was undertaken following the statutory process for development plans, including all consultation requirements.

The Plan was initiated in August 2005 when Planning Service published an Issues Paper as part of the consultation process. This was followed by an extensive public consultation exercise to engage the community and gain feedback on issues relating to HMOs including those identified in the HMO Issues Paper. During the consultation period Planning Service met with a wide range of agencies and parties. Public Consultation included meetings with local residents groups, focus groups, stakeholder meetings (students, local businesses, elected representatives) a meeting with the local Partnership Boards and telephone interviewing. Article 75 Groups were also contacted. Consultation was completed in December 2005.

The Draft HMO Subject Plan was published on 27 June 2006. This was followed by an 8-week Public Consultation Period during which the Department invited representations from all interested parties. The Department then requested the Planning Appeals Commission (PAC) to convene an Independent Examination of representations made in respect of the HMO Subject Plan. The PAC undertook the Independent Examination under Article 7 of the Planning (NI) Order 1991 (amended by The Planning Reform (NI) Order 2006) in October 2007. Their Report was received by the Department in March 2008 and the Subject Plan was adopted later that year.

During the consultation process Planning Service engaged with groups from the Holyland, Rugby Avenue, Stranmillis, Ballynafeigh, Cliftonville/ Antrim Road, West Belfast, Cavehill and Lisburn Road. Planning Service continues to meet with a range of community groups and periodically attends Partners and Communities Together (PACT) meetings.

Planning Service also continues to play an active role in the Inter Agency Group, the Stakeholders Forum established by the Minister of the Department for Education and Learning and the current joint Research Project which is considering long term strategic issues in respect of Student Housing.

Planning Appeals Commission

Mr R Beggs asked the Minister of the Environment how many major planning applications are awaiting referral to the Planning Appeals Commission and the reason for the delay in referral.

(AQW 748/11)

Minister of the Environment: The Planning Service has referred a number of major planning applications to the Planning Appeals Commission (PAC) with a request that they hold public local inquiries. In addition, the PAC has received requests from individual applicants to conduct a hearing into Notices of Opinion that the Department has issued, under the Article 31 procedures.

A list of the current cases referred to the PAC is attached and lists the priority order that the Department considers should be afforded to the individual cases.

The final decision on the scheduling of the inquiry or hearing and the timescale for reporting back to the Minister is a matter for the PAC.

Planning Appeals Commission

Mr R Beggs asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (i) how many major planning applications have been referred to the Planning Appeals Commission in each of the last two years; (ii) the date each application was referred and (iii) the current schedule for reporting back to the Minister in each case.

(AQW 749/11)

Minister of the Environment: The Planning Service has referred a number of major planning applications to the Planning Appeals Commission (PAC) with a request that they hold public local inquiries. In addition, the PAC has received requests from individual applicants to conduct a hearing into Notices of Opinion that the Department has issued, under the Article 31 procedures.

A list of the current cases referred to the PAC is attached and lists the priority order that the Department considers should be afforded to the individual cases.

The final decision on the scheduling of the inquiry or hearing and the timescale for reporting back to the Minister is a matter for the PAC.

Driver and Vehicle Agency

Ms D Purvis asked the Minister of the Environment (i) how many times the Driver and Vehicle Agency has passed on personal driver information to car parking companies or private security firms operating as, or on behalf of, car parking companies, in each of the last two years (ii) what checks his Department has in place to ensure that this information is treated confidentially and held securely; and (iii) the reason for passing on this information.

(AQW 810/11)

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 (DVA) under a formal agreement between the Department of the Environment and the Department for Transport.

438 vehicle keeper details were released in the period April 2008 to March 2009 and 1765 vehicle keeper details in the period April 2009 to March 2010.

Since November 2009, all car parking companies have been required to obtain membership of an accredited trade association (ATA) before they are able to obtain DVA data. The only ATA for the parking industry at present is the British Parking Association (BPA), and all car parking companies are required to obtain membership of their approved operator scheme (AOS) and adhere to an enforceable code of practice (CoP). The CoP is strictly monitored by the ATA, as this is a condition of their accreditation. If they fail to police their code they could lose their accreditation and their members would lose their ability to request DVA data. Equally, members who do not comply with the code would lose their membership and be unable to submit requests. DVA has the right to carry out ad hoc audits on companies to ensure all requests are appropriate and that data provided is stored and used as agreed. If such audits showed that the data was being used for a purpose other than that for which it was requested, the Information Commissioner would be asked to investigate.

In all cases, the reason for release of keeper information was the alleged non payment of car parking charges. The relevant legislation permitting the release of information from the vehicles register is regulation 27 (1) (e) of the Road Vehicles (Registration and Licensing) Regulations 2002, which states “(1) The Secretary of State may make any particulars contained in the register available for use - ... (e) by any person who can show to the satisfaction of the Secretary of State that he has reasonable cause for wanting the particulars to be made available to him”. Information is released to private car parking companies under this “reasonable cause” provision.

Driver and Vehicle Agency

Lord Browne asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of applications made to the Driver and Vehicle Agency for vehicle keeper information using (i) the V888/2 (NI) form; (ii) the V888/3 (NI) form; and (iii) the electronic access facility, since their introduction.

(AQW 822/11)

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 the Department of the Environment and the Department for Transport.

The V888 range of forms has been used since 2006 by members of the public and companies to make fee paying enquiries against the vehicle record. Since then 20,465 requests have been received on the V888/2 form, which is used by companies including insurance companies, finance companies and solicitors to request details from the vehicle record for a variety of reasons, and 2,203 requests on the V888/3 form, which is used by companies and landowners who require vehicle keeper information specifically in relation to penalty charge notices for alleged parking infractions.

Unlike DVLA, DVA do not provide a fee paying electronic access facility for such enquiries.

Air Pollution Incident in Glenavy

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of the Environment, in relation to the air pollution incident in the vicinity of Ulster Farm By-Products premises in Glenavy on 1 October 2010, (i) what investigations his departmental officials have initiated into the cause of this incident; (ii) to detail any findings as a result of these investigations; and (iii) to make a statement on this matter.

(AQW 970/11)

Minister of the Environment:

- (i) NIEA received a number of reports of a highly visible plume coming from the Ulster Farm By-Products plant on 1 October, one of which reported ‘black smoke’ coming from the plant stacks. NIEA staff visited the site in the morning and late in the evening of 1 October, when a steamy plume was observed coming from one stack, consistent with cooker gas by-passing the

plant condensers. NIEA accepts that this mode of operation may be necessary in exceptional circumstances and was notified by the company on this occasion.

(ii)&(iii) NIEA is investigating the events leading up to the incident and as agreed in recent discussions with my officials, a report will be forwarded to you on completion of this investigation.

Plastic Bags

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the reduction in the number of single use plastic bags issued between 2008/09 and 2009/10.

(AQO 216/11)

Minister of the Environment: I am pleased to report that in Northern Ireland we achieved a reduction of 9.3% in the number of single use carrier bags issued by the major supermarkets between 2008/09 and 2009/10. This equates to 19 million less bags issued.

However, we cannot be complacent and must continue our efforts to persuade people to “Get into the habit” of taking their own bags when shopping.

Climate Change Bill

Dr S Farry asked the Minister of the Environment what consideration he has given to a Climate Change Bill for Northern Ireland.

(AQO 217/11)

Minister of the Environment: I continue to consider the matter of a Climate Change Bill for Northern Ireland. The UK Climate Change Act 2008 extends to Northern Ireland and given the uncertainty levels associated with the current method of calculating greenhouse gas emissions I am not fully convinced of the need for a separate Northern Ireland Climate Change Bill at this time.

The Northern Ireland Executive has a target to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 25% below 1990 levels by 2025. In August 2010 I chaired the first meeting of the Executive’s Cross-Departmental Working Group on Greenhouse Gas Emissions. This group is primarily tasked with developing an action plan by December 2010 setting out the strategic approach and actions to be taken across Departments to meet the Programme for Government target.

Slurry

Mr W Irwin asked the Minister of the Environment, given the recent significant rainfall and the problems this presented for spreading slurry, if he would consider extending the open period if ground conditions do not improve in the near future.

(AQO 218/11)

Minister of the Environment: There is no facility within the legislation to change the dates of the closed period for spreading manures.

Planning Service Staff

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister of the Environment whether the redeployment of staff from the Planning Service was carried out on the basis of a selection scheme which assessed the experience, qualifications, length of service, performance, attendance and the needs of the individual.

(AQO 219/11)

Minister of the Environment: The Department sought volunteers for redeployment. However, as insufficient volunteers were identified, it was necessary to proceed with a random selection process. Random selection for redeployment removes any possibility - subconscious or otherwise - of personal bias. It is open, fair and transparent.

Planning Policy Statement 4

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on PPS 4.
(AQO 220/11)

Minister of the Environment: A revised and updated PPS 4 was originally submitted to the Executive in December 2008. As PPS 4 has not appeared on the agenda for an Executive meeting, it was recommended again to Executive colleagues in November 2009, December 2009 and August 2010.

I will publish PPS 4 once it is agreed by the Executive.

Strategic Leadership Board

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the recent work of the Strategic Leadership Board.
(AQO 222/11)

Minister of the Environment: The Strategic Leadership Board, which I chair, last met on 14 April 2010 to consider issues relevant to the local government reform programme. However, following the Executive's decision of 14 June 2010 that it would not be possible to create a new 11 council structure in May 2011, I agreed with the Board that we should defer future meetings until the Executive considered fresh proposals on a delivery timetable.

In spite of this, the Board and I were very keen to maintain the momentum that has been created and since April I have had a number of meetings with representatives from the local government sector. These have been to consider how councils might collaborate to achieve significant efficiencies and create savings so that ratepayers will see real value for money being delivered by their councils.

I am impressed with the work that the sector has taken forward so far and I have agreed to meet again, before the end of the year, to consider its detailed plans and recommendations for greater collaboration.

These meetings, which have involved members of the Strategic Leadership Board, have presented the opportunity for discussion on wider reform issues including options for reframing the local government reform delivery timetable.

Motorcycling

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of the Environment what co-operation his Department has had with the motorcycle community in promoting responsible motorcycling to reduce casualties and to ensure that other vehicle drivers are aware of motorcyclists.
(AQO 223/11)

Minister of the Environment: Road Safety is one of my highest priorities and I have been working to ensure that positive engagement with the motorcycle community takes place at every possible level.

My Department recently commissioned detailed research into the causes and influencing factors of motorcycle casualties in Northern Ireland. Good contacts were established with the most active biking clubs, as well as members of Northern Ireland biking forums. Input from the motorcycling community was central to developing this research, which will help shape the Department's road safety strategy for the next decade.

The recent consultation on the Department's proposed road safety strategy included a number of proposals to protect motorcyclists, including the establishment of a 'Motorcycle Forum' to strengthen links between the motorcycling community and government. The final draft strategy is currently being prepared, taking into consideration the feedback to the consultation.

Department of Finance and Personnel

External Consultants

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how much has been spent on external consultants in each of the last 5 years by (i) the Department; (ii) Central Procurement Directorate Construction; and (iii) Central Procurement Directorate Supplies and Service Division; and (iv) to provide a breakdown showing how much was paid to (a) PWC; (b) Deloitte; and (c) Ernst & Young. **(AQW 38/11)**

Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr S Wilson): Expenditure on external consultants in each of the last 5 years by (i) the Department of Finance and Personnel; (ii) Central Procurement Directorate Construction Divisions; and (iii) Central Procurement Directorate Supplies and Service Division; and (iv) a breakdown showing how much was paid to (a) PWC; (b) Deloitte; and (c) Ernst & Young is provided in the attached table.

	(i)				(ii)				(iii)			
	Department of Finance and Personnel (£m)				Central Procurement Directorate Construction Divisions (£m)				Central Procurement Directorate Supplies and Services Division (£m)			
Year	Total	PWC	Deloitte	Ernst & Young	Total	PWC	Deloitte	Ernst & Young	Total	PWC	Deloitte	Ernst & Young
05/06	2.6	*	*	*	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
06/07	4.4	*	*	*	0.01	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
07/08	**6.3	2.9	2.5	-	0.03	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
08/09	***4.5	2.7	0.6	-	-	-	-	-	0.01	-	-	-
09/10	#1.1	0.9	0.01	-	0.02	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

* Prior to 2007/08 the department is unable to extract this information without conducting an extensive manual exercise which would only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

** For comparative purposes this figure has been restated to exclude external consultancy expenditure by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB). The previously reported position inclusive of SEUPB was £6.6m.

*** This represents the final expenditure position following the completion of test drilling and review work. The previously reported provisional position was £4.9m.

This figure is provisional subject to completion of test drilling and review work.

Civil Service Temporary Promotions

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of posts, within the NI Civil Service, currently filled by deputising arrangements or temporary promotion, for the grades (i) Administrative Assistant to Deputy Principal (and equivalent); and (ii) Grade 7 & above. **(AQW 345/11)**

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The number of employees on temporary promotion within the Northern Ireland Civil Service at 1 September 2010 broken down by Department and the analogous grade into which they are temporarily promoted is detailed in the attached table.

Dept Group	Analogous Grade										
	Administrative Officer	Executive Officer 2	Executive Officer 1	Staff Officer	Deputy Principal	Grade 7	Grade 6	Senior Civil Servant	Industrial	Community Services Manager	Total
DARD	22	14	9	15	11	4	1	3	5		84
DCAL		1		1	2	1					5
DE	10	6	6	2	9	1					34
DEL	39	31	19	14	9	6					118
DETI	6	3	1	2	2	1					15
DFP	11	22	15	17	26	14	11	6			122
DHSSPS	1	2	1	4	3	5	1	3			20
DOE	32	14	7	9	8	2	2		1		75
DOJ	2	16		7	8	5	2			1	41
DRD	13	14	13	15	18	5	3	2	38		121
DSD	55	155	94	54	31	8	2	2			401
OFMDFM	1	2	2	1	2		1	2			11
PPS	14	11		3	1			7			36
Grand Total	206	291	167	144	130	52	23	25	44	1	1083

Deputising is an ad-hoc arrangement where employees are paid a deputising allowance for undertaking duties at a higher grade for a period of less than one month. The number of employees who were paid a deputising allowance on 31 August 2010 broken down by Department and substantive grade is as follows:

Dept Group	Administrative Assistant	Administrative Officer	Executive Officer 2	Executive Officer 1	Staff Officer	Deputy Principal	Grade 7	Industrial	Total
DARD	1	4	2	2	1	1		1	12
DCAL	1							2	3
DEL	2	6	1	2					11
DFP	1	2	1		1				5
DHSSPS	1	1	1						3
DOE	3	39	1	2	1				46
DOJ*	3	3							6

Dept Group	Administrative Assistant	Administrative Officer	Executive Officer 2	Executive Officer 1	Staff Officer	Deputy Principal	Grade 7	Industrial	Total
DRD	2	2						7	11
DSD	31	112	64	55	27	9	3		301
Grand Total	45	169	70	61	30	10	3	10	398

* Includes NI Prison Service staff, NI Courts Service staff and Youth Justice Agency non-general service staff

Civil Service Vacancies

Mr M Durkan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the (i) location; and (ii) number of vacancies in the Northern Ireland Civil Service at (a) Administrative Officer; (b) Executive Officer II; (c) Executive Officer I; and (d) Staff Officer; and (e) Deputy Principal grades, in each Government Department.

(AQW 655/11)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The location and number of vacancies in permanent posts in each Northern Ireland Civil Service department at the grades of (a) Administrative Officer; (b) Executive Officer 2; (c) Executive Officer 1; (d) Staff Officer; and (e) Deputy Principal grades, are set out in the attached table overleaf.

**VACANCIES (FULL TIME EQUIVALENT BASIS) IN EACH OF THE NI DEPARTMENTS AND THEIR AGENCIES IN GRADES:
AO; EO2; EO1; SO; DP; AT 24 SEPTEMBER 2010**

	A0	Location	EOII	Location	EO1	Location	SO	Location	DP	Location
DARD	3	1 Belfast 1 Cookstown 1 Stormont	1	Newry	3.5	2.5 Stormont 1 Ballymena	4	1 Derry 1 Cookstown 1 Stormont 1 Mallusk	2	Stormont
DCAL	2	Belfast	0		0		0		0	
DE	2	Derry	0		0		0		0	
DEL	6	5 Belfast 1 Newry	11.68	6.68 Belfast 1 Newry 1 Ballymena 1 Banbridge 1 Ballymoney 1 Omagh	13.24	12.74 Belfast 0.5 Limavady	8	Belfast	6	Belfast
DETI	0		1	Stormont	0		0		1	Stormont
DFP	5	Belfast	1	Belfast	2	Stormont	2	1 Belfast 1 Bangor	0	

	A0	Location	EOII	Location	EO1	Location	S0	Location	DP	Location
DHSSPS	0		0		0		0		0	
DOE	10.8	4.5 Belfast	11	6 Belfast	4	Belfast	6	Belfast	0	
		1.5 Downpatrick		4 Coleraine						
		1 Armagh		1 Downpatrick						
		1 Coleraine								
		1 Enniskillen								
		1 Omagh								
		0.8 Ards								
DOJ	8	6 Belfast	0		0		2	Belfast	3	Belfast
		1 Antrim								
		1 Maghaberry								

**VACANCIES (FULL TIME EQUIVALENT BASIS) IN EACH OF THE NI DEPARTMENTS AND THEIR AGENCIES IN GRADES:
AO; EO2; EO1; SO; DP; AT 24 SEPTEMBER 2010 (CONTINUED)**

	AO	Location	EOII	Location	EO1	Location	SO	Location	DP	Location
DRD	1	Omagh	1	Coleraine	3	1 Belfast 1 Downpatrick 1 Strangford	1	Belfast	1	Belfast
DSD	14	11 Belfast 1 Newcastle 1 Ballynahinch 1 Ballymena	8	6 Belfast 1 Portadown 1 Ards	2	Belfast	0		0	
OFMDFM	1	Stormont	0		0		0		2	Stormont
PPS	1	Lisburn	*6	5 Belfast 1 Derry	*		2	Belfast	0	
Total	53.8		40.68		27.74		25		15	

* Grade C currently spans both EO1 and EO2. There is an ongoing grading review of all Grade C/EO posts to establish if they are equivalent to Executive Officer 11 or Executive Officer 1.

Civil Service Temporary Promotions

Mr M Durkan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline the number of staff in the Northern Ireland Civil Service who are currently temporarily promoted in each Government Department; and to indicate the length of service involved in these cases.

(AQW 657/11)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: I would refer the Member to the reply I provided to Mr Patsy McGlone in AQW 345/11. Information regarding the length of service is not readily available and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Renewable Energy

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the schemes his Department provides or intends to provide to encourage the use of renewable energy.

(AQW 692/11)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: Policy responsibility on renewable energies is a DETI matter. However there are a number of schemes underway, or policies in development, within my Department that will encourage the use of renewable energy technologies.

My Department, with Executive approval, introduced 2 new domestic rates relief schemes from April this year. One of these, the Low Carbon Homes Scheme, provides rates relief for 2 to 5 years (depending on standard) for first occupiers of low or zero-carbon homes. This scheme is aimed at improving the energy efficiency of Northern Ireland's housing stock by encouraging the development of low and zero carbon homes.

My Department administers the Central Energy Efficiency Fund, which offers grant assistance of up to 50% of capital costs to public bodies for energy efficiency or renewable energy schemes within their buildings.

From the policy perspective, the Building Regulations set thermal standards for designers and builders that, while not mandating the use of low or zero carbon technologies are intended to be onerous enough to encourage their inclusion. Building regulations will be amended in two phases (in 2011 and again in 2013) to further tighten these standards. It is intended that from 2016 building regulations will move towards low or zero carbon dwellings. Each level of improved thermal standards will result in an even greater likelihood that renewable technologies will be required to meet these standards.

Civil Service Redundancies

Mr J Craig asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many people were made redundant from each (i) Civil Service Department; and (ii) Department's agencies and arms-length bodies in each of the last three years; and what were the associated costs of the redundancies for each year.

(AQW 750/11)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The total number of people and cost to each Department, its agencies and arms-length bodies who were made redundant during financial years 2007-2008, 2008-2009 and 2009-2010 are set out in the table below.

Departmental Expenditure on Redundancies						
	07 / 08		08 / 09		09 / 10	
Departments	Figures	Costs	Figures	Costs	Figures	Costs
DETI	1					
DFP					1	
DARD					1	

Departmental Expenditure on Redundancies						
	07 / 08		08 / 09		09 / 10	
Departments	Figures	Costs	Figures	Costs	Figures	Costs
NIPS					1	
DCAL – National Museums NI	5	153,013	5	193,204	9	578,451

Departmental Costs include the initial costs for leavers and any ongoing liabilities for the annual compensation payments during the three year period.

No other Departments, agencies or arm-length bodies had redundancies during this period.

Individual costs cannot be provided as this would be in breach of the Data Protection Act.

Civil Service Redundancies

Mr J Craig asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what are the current Civil Service redundancy payment terms for people (i) under 50 years old; and (ii) 50 years old and above.
(AQW 751/11)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The details requested are contained in the rules of the Civil Service Compensation Scheme (Northern Ireland) as published on the Civil Service Pensions website at www.civilservicepensions-ni.gov.uk and can be accessed as follows:

Civil Service redundancy payment terms for people under 50 years old

www.civilservicepensions-ni.gov.uk/rules_of_the_cscs_ni_-2.pdf

See rules 2.7 - 2.9a & rules 2A.6 - 2A.7.4

Civil Service redundancy payment terms for people 50 years old and above

www.civilservicepensions-ni.gov.uk/rules_of_the_cscs_ni_-2.pdf

See rules 2.2 - 2.6a & rules 2A.3 - 2A.5.13; Also rules 2.10 & 2A.5a

There are currently no formal compensation arrangements for members of the 'nuvos' pension arrangement for new entrants to the civil service from 30 July 2007. Until these terms are put in place permanent staff who are members of nuvos and who leave on redundancy will receive an ex-gratia payment of 1 months earnings for each year of nuvos service.

Compensation arrangements for civil servants in Northern Ireland generally mirror those that are put in place for the home civil service and which are now under review. I would also refer to the reply I gave my hon. Friend the member for East Belfast on 24 September 2010 (AQO 84/11).

Contracts Awarded by the Central Procurement Directorate

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to list (i) the contracts awarded by the Central Procurement Directorate in each of the last three years and the companies to which they were awarded, including whether or not the successful companies were Northern Ireland based; and (ii) the companies who tendered for the contracts but were unsuccessful, including whether or not the unsuccessful companies were Northern Ireland based.

(AQW 755/11)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The information requested in part (i) and part (ii) of the question has been placed in the library.

Information on contracts awarded prior to May 2008 could be obtained only in part and at disproportionate cost.

Surplus Land

Dr A McDonnell asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail any (i) land; and (ii) property owned by his Department which is currently deemed surplus to requirements, including the location of the land or property and any plans for its disposal.

(AQW 775/11)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The following owned land and property in DFP is currently surplus.

Name of land or property	Postal address	Post Code	Plans for disposal
Gola Road	314 Gola Road, Attybarron, Lisnaskea	BT92 0FE	Sale agreed on open market, contracts being exchanged.
Andersonstown SSO	35-37 Slieveban Drive, Andersonstown	BT11 8HL	With LPS for disposal. A number of public sector organisations have expressed an interest in acquiring.

Rates Arrears

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the amount owed in rates arrears in each local council district.

(AQW 829/11)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: At any point in time, the total amount of ratepayer debt comprises two elements: the previous years' ratepayer debt; and in-year debt. At 26 September 2010, the previous years' ratepayer debt of £157 million at 31 March 2010 had been reduced to £113 million. The break down between district council areas is given in Table 1.

It is difficult to quantify in-year ratepayer debt given that, as part of normal business, bills are issued and paid on a daily basis.

TABLE 1 – PREVIOUS YEARS' RATEPAYER DEBT AT 26 SEPTEMBER 2010 BY DISTRICT COUNCIL AREA

District Council	Previous Years' Debt
Antrim	£2,598,803
Ards	£4,145,216
Armagh	£3,434,166
Ballymena	£2,092,514
Ballymoney	£953,874
Banbridge	£2,223,290
Belfast	£36,955,241
Carrickfergus	£2,014,820
Castlereagh	£3,047,595
Coleraine	£2,492,391

District Council	Previous Years' Debt
Cookstown	£963,993
Craigavon	£5,926,004
Derry	£6,808,723
Down	£3,786,376
Dungannon & South Tyrone	£2,093,605
Fermanagh	£2,275,381
Larne	£1,184,322
Limavady	£1,429,007
Lisburn	£7,688,820
Magherafelt	£1,133,304
Moyle	£577,244
Newry & Mourne	£6,249,764
Newtownabbey	£4,776,712
North Down	£4,665,614
Omagh	£1,756,396
Strabane	£1,510,064
Total	£112,783,239

The collection of all rates due remains a very high priority for Land & Property Services, and rigorous pursuit of outstanding debt continues.

Civil Service Temporary Promotions

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to AQW 348/11, to detail, for each of the last three years, the (i) temporary promotions; and (ii) deputising arrangements in the Civil Service, broken down by (a) substantive grade and promoted grade; (b) length of promotion arrangement; and (c) annual salary increase.

(AQW 845/11)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: Information regarding individual temporary promotions and deputising arrangements for each of the last three years is not readily available and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Civil Service Temporary Promotions

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to AQW 348/11, whether an Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out on the Civil Service policy on temporary promotions and deputising arrangements, in the last three years.

(AQW 846/11)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: No Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out on the Civil Service policy on temporary promotions and deputising arrangements in the last three years.

Civil Service Temporary Promotions

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel (i) to provide the original Civil Service policy on temporary promotions and deputising arrangements; and (ii) any revised versions in the last three years.

(AQW 848/11)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The original policy on temporary promotions and deputising is provided overleaf (Section 2286 of the Northern Ireland Civil Service Pay and Conditions Code). The amalgamation of the NICS Code and associated civil service circulars began in 1998 and these were incorporated into the NICS HR Handbook in early 2007, and now available to staff on the HRConnect portal. There has been no revision of the policy in the last 3 years.

NICS Pay and Conditions code

Section 2286 Temporary Promotion

Officers may be temporarily promoted if they take on the full range of duties of a post in a higher grade, otherwise than by substantive promotion or in substitution for an absent officer. Part-time staff who regularly work 15 hours or more per week, are eligible for consideration for temporary promotion or substitution. However, staff will be required to work the hours of the post into which they are temporarily promoted or substituted.

Temporary promotion will not be used where it is possible to make a substantive promotion. A temporary promotion is one authorised: -

- a. To fill a post which is created as a temporary measure for a special project;
- b. To meet short-term fluctuations in the level and/or volume of work at particular times;
- c. To cover a vacancy for a short period pending the filling of the post by normal means; the period should not exceed 3 months;
- d. To cover the absence of the post-holder on maternity leave, whether or not she had indicated an intention to return within 3 months;
- e. Exceptionally, when it is known that a post-holder will be absent for more than 3 months and someone in a lower grade takes on the full duties of the post.

A temporary promotion will not normally be authorised for a period exceeding one year.

A continuous period of substitution will be converted to temporary promotion once the substitute has completed 3 months' continuous service in the higher grade. If it is clear from the outset that the substitute will be required to act for more than 3 months, temporary promotion must be granted from the outset.

The granting of temporary promotion is at the discretion of the Establishment Officer who should be satisfied that a vacant post exists at the higher level grade and that the person to be temporarily promoted will carry out the full range of duties of the higher grade.

Temporary promotion will normally be to the next higher grade, but in exceptional circumstances someone may be temporarily promoted to a grade above this.

Full details of any substitution/temporary promotion involving a move of 2 or more grades must be submitted to Personnel Services Branch, DFP, for approval in advance and before any commitment is given to the individual.

Temporary promotion does not confer any rights to substantive promotion. When an officer returns to the former grade after a period of temporary promotion, that period does not count towards seniority at the higher grade.

For all purposes other than seniority, temporary promotion will be treated as substantive promotion.

City of Culture 2013 in Derry

Mr R McCartney asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether he has identified any funding from his Department's budget to be allocated to the City of Culture 2013 in Derry; and if so, how much and for what specific purpose, projects or programmes in the City of Culture is this money intended.
(AQW 859/11)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: My department has not identified any funding from its budget to be allocated to the City of Culture 2013 in Londonderry.

Northern Ireland Block Grant

Mr C Lyttle asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of the anticipated impact of the forthcoming UK Comprehensive Spending Review on the Northern Ireland Block Grant.
(AQO 184/11)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The 20 October Spending Review announcement by the Chancellor will have significant implications for Northern Ireland. The Executive, through the Barnett Formula, receives over 90 per cent of its resources from such Spending Reviews.

Therefore the anticipated budget reductions announced by the Chancellor will have an enormous impact on the Northern Ireland Block.

Banking: Businesses

Mr F McCann asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether he has had any discussions with the four main banks about the concerns expressed by the four main Churches regarding business banking practices.
(AQO 185/11)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: I publicly responded to the Churches joint statement on the day of its release (17th June 2010), and my officials met with the four main banks in the days immediately afterwards in the context of the Executive's Cross Sector Advisory Forum work on bank lending to discuss the level of information on bank lending practices here and the concerns raised.

The availability of finance is vital for economic recovery and remains, strategically, a very important issue. Despite banking being a reserved matter, I will continue to do all that I can to help address the issues raised once again by the Churches. I have written to both George Osbourne and Vince Cable on financing private sector growth and to ask that the Independent Commission they have established to look at this issue considers the distinctive nature of our banking sector locally. As two of our banks are Irish owned, I have had ongoing discussions with the Irish Finance Minister and I am scheduled to meet him again in November.

I am also seeking to improve the level of information available on banking lending to SMEs in Northern Ireland and have recently agreed an approach to this with the British Bankers Association.

Public Expenditure

Mr J Bell asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline why Northern Ireland receives a higher level of funding per head of population than other parts of the UK.
(AQO 186/11)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: Northern Ireland has, for many years, had higher per capita public expenditure than other UK regions. The primary reason relates back to the establishment of the Barnett Formula in 1979 and its subsequent application to the UK regions. This resulted in allocations, which, to some degree, made allowances for perceived additional need.

The public expenditure allocations ever since have been adding to this relatively high starting position. There has been considerable protection for the higher spend over the years because much of the growth in UK

public expenditure has been in areas such as health and education – areas where we have what is known as ‘full comparability’.

NI Water: Costs

Rev Dr R Coulter asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what are the estimated cost implications to the Executive of the Minister for Regional Development's proposal to bring NI Water back into public ownership.

(AQO 187/11)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: Firstly, I must point out that NI Water has never left public ownership. It is a GOC - Government Owned Company.

I presume the question relates to the DRD Minister's announced intention to remove the GOC status and bring NI Water under more direct DRD control. There are a number of classification and accounting issues that would need to be reassessed by DRD if NI Water was to cease being a GOC and become either an NDPB or Government Agency. We will need to wait until the DRD Minister puts forward detailed proposals before we can properly assess the cost of changing the status of NI Water.

NI Water: Costs

Mr A Bresland asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of the potential budgetary implications of removing NI Water's status as a Government Company.

(AQO 188/11)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: If NI Water is formally reclassified from a GOC to a NDPB or Government Agency the two major accounting issues of asset valuation and VAT will need to be addressed and both of these have potentially serious budgetary implications for the Executive. NI Water's assets would need to be revalued and it is likely that this would result in a much larger figure than the present valuation figure of £1 billion. This would result in a significant increase in depreciation costs which would have to be met by the Executive. Also, NI Water would become liable for VAT payments.

The precise implications of changing the status of NI Water depend on the proposals brought forward by the Regional Development Minister but

it is possible that the total cost for the Executive of reclassification could be as much as £200 million per annum.

Budget 2011-15

Mr T Lunn asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how he will ensure that the 2011-2015 Budget will reflect the priorities of a new Programme for Government.

(AQO 189/11)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: At present the Budget 2010 work is running in parallel with the development of a new Programme for Government. I am aware of the emerging themes within that work and I am confident that the Executive's draft budget will be consistent with the vision of the new Programme for Government.

Employment

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether he has sought to identify and prioritise departmental programmes which create and protect jobs, particularly in the construction sector; and to outline any major examples.

(AQO 190/11)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The Executive's Priority Measures to Deal with the Economic Downturn includes actions identified by departments, working with wider stakeholders, to mitigate the effects of the downturn. These include measures to support businesses in retaining employment, and actions in relation to infrastructure and procurement, some of which specifically relate to the construction and small business sectors.

In terms of Budget 2010 it will ultimately be for individual Ministers to prioritise their departmental programmes for funding in the budget process. This will require some tough choices and we will need to consider all options open to us. I have recently completed a series of budget bi-lateral meetings with Executive colleagues to take their mind on our collective priorities and pressures.

My own view is that growing our economy must be the number one priority if we are to improve living standards locally, and I believe future spending allocations must reflect this priority in the Budget.

Government: Audit

Ms C Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of whether proper audit procedures are met when Ministers make unfunded commitments.

(AQO 191/11)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: Departments must operate within delegated limits and in accordance with DFP guidance including Managing Public Money Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Guide to Expenditure Appraisal and Evaluation. When DFP examines proposals outside delegated limits it provides approval only to the project in principle, making no commitments on funding. Routine test-drilling by DFP monitors spend below delegated limits. All commitments made by Ministers must be in accordance with the requirements of this guidance. Ministers who make unfunded commitments, do so at the risk of their Department's other spending priorities as there can be no guarantee that the necessary funding will subsequently be provided at a future monitoring round or budget process.

Utilities

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of how the Executive's ownership of utility service organisations could impact on the growth of the private sector.

(AQO 192/11)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: Two of Northern Ireland's utility service functions - energy and telecoms - have been in the private sector for some time now and have been able to access the resources they need for investment and growth and to allow them to operate in what are now increasingly competitive but well regulated markets. This has also benefited consumers. It is unthinkable that these services would come back under the control of the Executive and to do so would significantly reduce the size of our local private sector. NI Water is a GoCo and has never left public ownership but many of the same principles would apply to any suggestion to bring it back under more direct departmental control.

Banking: Businesses

Mr M Durkan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline what representations he will make to the banks, in light of the Church Leaders' view that banks have shown a lack of integrity in their dealings with longstanding business customers.

(AQO 193/11)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: I publicly responded to the Churches joint statement on the day of its release (17th June 2010), and my officials met with the four main banks in the days immediately afterwards in the context of the Executive's Cross Sector Advisory Forum work on bank lending to discuss the level of information on bank lending practices here and the concerns raised.

The availability of finance is vital for economic recovery and remains, strategically, a very important issue. Despite banking being a reserved matter, I will continue to do all that I can to help address the issues raised once again by the Churches. I have written to both George Osbourne and Vince Cable on financing private sector growth and to ask that the Independent Commission they have established to look at this issue considers the distinctive nature of our banking sector locally. As two of our banks are Irish owned, I have had ongoing discussions with the Irish Finance Minister and I am scheduled to meet him again in November.

I am also seeking to improve the level of information available on banking lending to SMEs in Northern Ireland and have recently agreed an approach to this with the British Bankers Association.

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Soya Milk

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to define the status and legality of the sale of 'soya milk'.

(AQW 418/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Mr M McGimpsey): The name "Soya milk" is not permitted under the Spreadable Fats (Marketing Standards) and the Milk and Milk Products (Protection of Designations) Regulations (NI) 2008 (SR No.239), which implement "Community Provisions" controlling designations for milk and milk products.

Foodstuffs intended for human consumption may be marketed as milk and milk products only if they comply with the definitions and designations laid down in Annex XII of EC Regulation (EC) No.1234/2007.

The EC Regulation defines 'milk' as the normal mammary secretion obtained from one or more milkings without any additions or extractions.

The term 'milk' and the designations used for 'milk products' may be used in association with a word or words to designate composite products.

There are derogations for some products using dairy designations for example; for products which are clearly not dairy but have traditionally used terms associated with milk; for products which do not compete with milk and milk products and products where the dairy designation is clearly used to describe a characteristic quality of the food. These have been documented in guidance issued by the Food Standards Agency. Coconut milk is an example of one such derogation, however, "soya milk" does not qualify for such a derogation because it competes directly with cows' milk.

Failure to comply with the Community provisions implemented by these regulations is an offence and any person who contravenes or fails to comply with them is liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding level 5 of the standard scale.

Capital Projects in the North Down Area

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on all his Department's capital projects in the North Down area that (i) were commenced or completed in 2010/11; (ii) are planned for 2011/12; and (iii) have been postponed because of budgetary constraints.

(AQW 426/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: There were no capital developments which either commenced or completed in the North Down constituency area in 2010/11.

Only once the level of resources available for the next Budget period has been confirmed will I be able to look at all of my priorities and be certain of the availability of funding, both to build and operate facilities, before being able to confirm which projects will proceed.

Radiotherapy at Altnagelvin Hospital

Mr J McCallister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when a decision will be made on the business case for radiotherapy services at Altnagelvin Hospital.
(AQW 444/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: A final decision on the business case for this project can only be made once I have clarity on affordability. This is true of all capital infrastructure projects. My Department is facing huge financial pressures in relation to both my capital and revenue budgets. Only when the outcome of Budget 2010 is known, will it be possible to make a decision on this project.

Radiotherapy at Altnagelvin Hospital

Mr J McCallister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the timescale for the development of the satellite radiotherapy centre at Altnagelvin Hospital; and to outline any proposed changes to the centre since it was first announced in 2008.
(AQW 446/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The timescale for the completion of the project cannot be confirmed until the business case has been approved and funding confirmed following the outcome of Budget 2010.

The nature and extent of services being provided has remained unchanged since my announcement of 2008 and will be provided as an integral part of the Northern Ireland cancer service.

Radiotherapy at Altnagelvin Hospital

Mr J McCallister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for a description of a satellite radiotherapy service; and for his assessment of the impact that a new satellite radiotherapy centre would have on patient services at Altnagelvin Hospital.
(AQW 448/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The new satellite radiotherapy service will provide radiotherapy services, coupled with an increase in chemotherapy services. Radiotherapy services will be delivered from three linear accelerators for patients in the northwest of Northern Ireland and for patients from the Republic of Ireland.

Patients will benefit from having their treatment delivered in one centre. This will ensure that the majority of patients from the northwest will have the opportunity to receive their radiotherapy treatment in conjunction with their chemotherapy treatment in one location comparatively close to where they reside.

Radiotherapy at Altnagelvin Hospital

Mr J McCallister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if the satellite radiotherapy centre at Altnagelvin Hospital will have the capacity to provide a service for all patients in the North West with common cancers to prevent patients from having to travel to Belfast for treatment.
(AQW 449/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The business case for the Altnagelvin Satellite Radiotherapy Unit proposes that the unit will have the capacity to treat all patients with common

cancers from the Western Trust area, the northern sector of the Northern Trust area, and patients from Donegal in the Republic of Ireland. Those patients with more complex cancers (approximately 10% of the catchment population) will continue to receive treatment at the Cancer Centre in Belfast or in the case of Republic of Ireland patients, at national treatment centres in the Republic.

Radiotherapy at Altnagelvin Hospital

Mr J McCallister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if the satellite radiotherapy centre at Altnagelvin Hospital will be offering a full-time service.

(AQW 450/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The business case for the Altnagelvin Satellite Radiotherapy Unit proposes that radiotherapy services will be offered on a full-time basis i.e. Monday to Friday, 8.5 hours per day.

Causeway Hospital Accident and Emergency Unit

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the current recommended staff complement of (i) consultants; (ii) medical; and (iii) nursing staff for the Causeway Hospital Accident and Emergency Unit; and whether this complement is currently being met.

(AQW 453/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The current staffing complement at the Causeway Hospital Accident and Emergency Department is provided in the table below.

Staff Compliment - Causeway Hospital Accident & Emergency department		
	Causeway Hospital	
	Recommended	In post
Consultants	3	3
Associate Specialist	1	1
Specialty Doctor (newly established post)	1	1
Trainee doctors	7	7
Band 7 nurse	1	1
Band 6 nurse	7.15wte*	6.56wte
Band 5 nurse	22.71wte	22.69wte
Band 3 nurse	1.84wte	1.72wte
Band 2 nurse	2.1wte	1.84wte

Source: Northern Health & Social Care Trust

wte - Whole Time Equivalent

Timeline for fitting Hearing Aids

Ms M Ritchie asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he has any plans to implement a standardised time-line, from the time of initial diagnosis, to fit patients suffering from hearing loss with a hearing aid.

(AQW 462/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Whilst there are currently no such plans in place, a Regional Audiology Group, facilitated by the Health and Social Care Board, is working to agree standards across Northern Ireland.

Hearing Screening Programme

Ms M Ritchie asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what evaluation has taken place of the hearing screening programme, with particular reference to training on tinnitus for GPs and Ear, Nose and Throat consultants.

(AQW 463/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The UK National Screening Committee has considered the current evidence on adult hearing loss and has recommended that research evidence does not support a population screening programme. Ear, Nose and Throat (ENT) consultants receive training on tinnitus as part of the Otology Module, which is evaluated through their professional examination and accreditation. ENT training, including the treatment of tinnitus, is also provided as part of the curriculum of junior doctors, including those training to become GPs. GPs receive ongoing training on ENT topics through Continuing Professional Development.

General Medical Council

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many doctors have been referred to the General Medical Council for investigation in each of the last three years.

(AQW 477/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The number of doctors in Northern Ireland investigated under fitness to practise procedures by the General Medical Council in each of the last three years is shown below:

2007	2008	2009
96	104	107

Doctors Struck off the Medical Register

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many doctors have been struck off the medical register in each of the last three years.

(AQW 478/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The number of doctors in Northern Ireland erased from the General Medical Council's register in each of the last three years is shown below:

2007	2008	2009
1	0	5

Agenda for Change Settlement

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many former members of staff have still to receive their Agenda for Change settlement.

(AQW 479/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: There are 8,638 former employees of Health and Social Care that have yet to receive arrears of pay due to them under the Agenda for Change arrangements. Payroll staff are continuing to process these payments along with the other competing priorities of providing a payroll service for the current Health and Social Care workforce.

Unused Medicines

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans his Department has to deal with wastage as a result of unused medicines, particularly tablets.

(AQW 480/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department operates a policy whereby all unused medicines, including tablets, are destroyed where their full potency, safety or quality cannot be guaranteed. This is applicable in all cases where medicines reach their expiry dates or when unused medicines are returned by patients to their local pharmacies.

When a medicine has reached its expiry date it is routinely destroyed as out of date drugs can deteriorate in strength and become less effective. There is also the potential for expired drugs to pose a health risk to the patient. Unused medicines returned to pharmacies cannot be dispensed again to other patients as the pharmacist cannot be certain that the returned drugs have not been tampered with nor can the quality be guaranteed.

Local pharmacies offer a waste management service and patients are encouraged to return unused drugs to their pharmacies to ensure their safe disposal.

Heating Costs Across the Health Service

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans his Department has to reduce heating costs across the Health Service.

(AQW 481/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department encourages the adoption of best practice on heating efficiency including targeting and monitoring energy performance as part of our continuous drive to reduce overall carbon emissions and contribute to overall cost efficiencies.

Student Nurses

Mr F Molloy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what provision is being put in place to ensure that student nurses can gain adequate work experience.

(AQW 483/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Student nurses in Northern Ireland complete a Nursing and Midwifery Council approved curriculum over three years. Approximately 50% of this time is spent in clinical placements.

Drumhaw Nursing Home

Mrs M O'Neill asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the future plans for Drumhaw Nursing Home, particularly in relation to previous commitments.

(AQW 484/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Western Health and Social Care Trust remains committed to meeting the needs of all permanent residents within Drumhaw Residential Care Home for as long as the Home can meet their assessed care needs in line with the assurance I gave in my statement in April last year.

Medical Negligence Cases

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the cost to each Health and Social Care Trust of (i) defending; and (ii) compensation resulting from medical negligence cases in the 2009/10 financial year.

(AQW 540/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information requested is provided in the table below:

TABLE 1: CLINICAL NEGLIGENCE COSTS IN 2009/10

HSC Trust	Number of cases	Damages / Compensation (£)	Defence Costs (£)	Plaintiff Costs (£)
Belfast	176	1,618,725	600,968	768,054
Northern	122	3,424,775	391,461	523,726
South Eastern	105	1,169,417	371,235	506,423
Southern	114	451,250	273,862	284,550
Western	58	676,793	109,590	344,830
NI Ambulance	0	0	0	0

Source: CN1

Cost of Treating Prisoners

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the cost to the Health Service of treating prisoners in each of the last three years.

(AQW 542/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I refer the member to the information provided in AQW 7714/10.

Energy Bills

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action is being taken to reduce energy bills in the Health and Social Care Trusts.

(AQW 543/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department encourages the adoption of best practice on energy efficiency including targeting and monitoring energy performance of the Health, Social Care and Public Safety Estates as part of our continuous drive to reduce carbon emissions and contribute to cost efficiencies.

Waiting List for Assessment by an Occupational Therapist

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people in each Health and Social Care Trust area are currently on the waiting list for assessment by an Occupational Therapist.

(AQW 545/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information is not available in the format requested.

McDermott Brothers Case

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is the cost to date of the legal advice received by the Western Health and Social Care Trust in relation to the McDermott brothers case.

(AQW 562/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I am advised that the Western Health and Social Care Trust (the Trust) has an annual block contract with the Directorate of Legal Services which covers all aspects of legal services sought by the Trust. The hours used to provide legal advice in this case have been drawn from this block. It is not possible to separate out the specific cost for this case.

I am also advised that, in addition, the Trust secured legal advice from Senior Counsel and the cost of this will be in the region of £4,000.

Waiting Times in Accident and Emergency Units

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the average waiting time in each Accident and Emergency unit for each day of the month of August 2010.

(AQW 575/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Daily information on waiting times at Accident & Emergency Departments is not currently collected by the Department. Information on Accident & Emergency waiting times is collected and published monthly, and is available from:

http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/stats_research/stats-activity_stats-2/emergency_care.htm

Accident and Emergency Units

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what his Department is doing to encourage people to see their doctor or pharmacist rather than attending an Accident and Emergency unit for non-emergency matters.

(AQW 576/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I have taken many opportunities to remind the public about the importance of using A&E services responsibly.

Public information issued by the Public Health Agency emphasise that, unless the condition is one that clearly requires emergency treatment, members of the public should contact their GP, and I have invested over £6.6m additional funding to GP practices in the past three years for improving patients' access.

Community pharmacy offers a range of services aimed at dealing with non-emergency matters. These services include advice on the response to symptoms, treatment of minor conditions and the appropriate use of medicines. They are widely publicised in the community and healthcare settings.

Medical Drugs

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why Northern Ireland spends proportionately more on medical drugs than any other part of the UK.

(AQW 577/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: We have the highest portion of elderly people in the UK and this section of our population is growing. We also have the youngest population in the UK. These two groups make the greatest demands on the Health Service.

My Department has increased the generic dispensing rate from 43% to the current rate of 59%. It is anticipated that the target of 64% will be achieved in 2010-11, which compares favourably with England.

In secondary care a substantial proportion of the medicines are procured through a regional tendering process thus ensuring best value for money for the Health Service.

Disposal of Unused Drugs

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the cost to the Health Service of the disposal of unused drugs in each of the last five years.

(AQW 578/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Across pharmacy practices in Northern Ireland the safe disposal of prescription drugs and medicines is managed through a waste medicines contract in line with legislative requirements. The costs for the last 5 years are set out in the table below.

Year	Cost	Period	Cost expressed as % of total DHSSPS budget
2005-06	£202,968	July 05 – June 06	0.005%
2006-07	£290,000	April 06 – March 07	0.007%
2007-08	£337,940	July 07 - June 08	0.008%
2008-09	£319,790	Jan 08 – Dec 09	0.008%
2009-10	£371,390	April 09 – March 10	0.008%

All of the five Health Trusts operate similar clinical waste disposal contracts. The costs in relation to these contracts are not available.

Prescriptions

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he has identified any trends in the number of prescriptions issued or collected since he removed the prescription charge in April 2010.

(AQW 579/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Data are only available for the first three months since prescriptions charges were abolished and it is not yet possible to confirm trends.

Radiotherapy Centre at Altnagelvin Hospital

Mr M Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on development of the Radiotherapy Centre at Altnagelvin Hospital.

(AQW 623/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Western Trust and my Department are working to ensure that the new development is appropriate in terms of capacity, quality and value for money.

The business case approval process is well advanced – it requires that the Trust's proposal has the support of the Health and Social Care Board as commissioner of services, the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and the Department of Finance and Personnel.

The timescale for the completion of the project cannot be confirmed until the business case has been approved and funding confirmed following the outcome of Budget 2010.

Trigeminal Neuralgia Patients

Mr C Lyttle asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why there is currently no specialist surgical treatment, such as microvascular decompression, available to Trigeminal Neuralgia patients.

(AQW 659/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Trigeminal Neuralgia is rare and affects around 70 people each year in Northern Ireland. Medication is the first line of treatment but for patients whose condition does not respond to medication, surgery may be an option. It is for clinicians to decide on the most appropriate treatment for patients including whether a referral for specialist surgery may be appropriate.

Food Standards Agency

Mr C Lyttle asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the impact that the reorganisation of the Food Standards Agency will have on its operations in Northern Ireland.

(AQW 792/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Food standards is a transferred matter so the devolved administrations are not bound by Westminster government decisions affecting FSA in England. Any decisions regarding the functions of the Food Standards Agency for Northern Ireland will be a matter for the Northern Ireland Executive. As changes are implemented in England the priority for Northern Ireland must be that our access to expertise and specialist support is not diminished.

Gastric Banding

Mrs M O'Neill asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether gastric banding is available through the Health Service.

(AQW 865/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Presently there is no dedicated bariatric surgery service available in Northern Ireland. However where an individual GP considers that a patient would benefit from such surgery there is a procedure which allows for the GP to exceptionally refer the case to the Health and Social Care Board who may then, subject to clinical assessment, arrange for the appropriate surgery to be carried out in England.

Regional Neurology Centre at the Royal Victoria Hospital

Dr A McDonnell asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if the number of available beds at the Regional Neurology Centre at the Royal Victoria Hospital will be reduced from 23 to 15 from the 1 October 2010.

(AQW 874/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The delivery of services at the Royal Victoria Hospital is a matter for the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust as the service provider. I am however aware that the Trust plans to reduce the number of available neurology beds in October 2010 and bring the neurology service in line with comparable peers in other parts of the UK. The reduction in beds is being planned in parallel with an ongoing modernisation programme within the neurology service.

This programme includes a number of workstreams to review current neurology services and patient pathway models and includes a review of bed utilisation. The aim of the modernisation programme is to develop a more efficient and responsive service with reduced length of inpatient stays that will enable the same level of inpatient activity to be provided with a reduced number of beds.

Department of Justice

Capital Projects in the North Down Area

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Justice for an update on all his Department's capital projects in the North Down area that (i) were or will be commenced or completed in 2010/11; (ii) are planned for 2011/12; and (iii) have been postponed because of budgetary constraints.

(AQW 430/11)

Minister of Justice (Mr D Ford): A number of capital works to improve the Newtownards courthouse are due to be completed by 1st October 2010.

Bangor and Newtownards courthouses received an upgrade to their CCTV system and the number of surveillance cameras was increased. This work was completed during August 2010.

Information and Communication Technology Network upgrades at Bangor and Newtownards courthouses will be commenced or completed in 2010/11.

The Police Service of Northern Ireland completed the ground floor refurbishment of the Newtownards PSNI station in 2010/11 and is planning to commence the improvement / softening of the Newtownards Gatehouse during 2010/11. This project will continue into 2011/12.

No capital projects in the North Down area have been postponed because of budgetary constraints.

The Department of Justice budget has not yet been set for 2011/12 but no new capital projects in the North Down area currently planned for that year.

Police Stations

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of Justice to detail any correspondence he has had with the PSNI in relation to the delay in disposing of 26 police stations; and the cost to the PSNI of maintaining these stations.

(AQW 445/11)

Minister of Justice: The management of the police estate is a matter for the Chief Constable, who is accountable to the Northern Ireland Policing Board. I am committed to respecting the operational independence of the Chief Constable and the role of the Policing Board.

The information requested on the cost to the PSNI of maintaining stations can be obtained by contacting the PSNI directly.

Telephone Rights For Prisoners

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 21/11, whether non-foreign national prisoners are entitled to free weekly phone calls, and if not, what telephone rights are available to them.

(AQW 541/11)

Minister of Justice: All prisoners are entitled to purchase phone credits, the limits being dependent on the regime level. In addition, local managers have discretion to permit individual free telephone calls, where considered appropriate, especially on committal to custody and in instances of family distress, and in particular where prisoners have had no family contact for prolonged periods. Phone calls are also permitted where prisoners have no financial support from families.

Fines

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Justice to detail the total amount imposed in fines by the Courts in each of the last three years; and how much of each currently remains unpaid.

(AQW 617/11)

Minister of Justice: The table below details the amount of fines imposed in each of the last three years and the total amounts that remain unpaid.

	2007 (Jan-Dec)	2008 (Jan-Dec)	2009 (Jan-Dec)
Total Fines Imposed	£10,923,136.77	£8,088,623.15	£7,862,453.10
Total Fines Outstanding*	£807,622.91	£1,144,785.89	£1,583,082.47
Percentage Outstanding	7.4%	14.2%	20.1%

* The Total Fines Outstanding figure is calculated against the Total Fines Imposed in that year.

More recently imposed fines may not be yet due for payment. In default of payment, the outstanding fines will be subject to enforcement by PSNI.

Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service also operate a Fine Collection Scheme which aims to encourage prompt payment of fines. Since its introduction, in May 2009, there has been a 30% reduction in the number of fine warrants issued to the PSNI, this equates to £1.8m recovered without the need for police intervention.

Drugs Seizures in Prisoners

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Justice to detail the number of drugs seizures from (i) prisoners; and (ii) visitors in prisons in each of the last three years.
(AQW 618/11)

Minister of Justice: The table below sets out the number of drug seizures from prisoners and visitors in each of the last 3 years:

	2007	2008	2009	2010 to date	Total
Prisoners	405	382	291	176	1254
Visitors	14	34	112	45	205

Table 2 below sets out the number of reports (also expressed as a percentage of the number of seizures) made by prison authorities to the PSNI of incidents of visitors to prisons supplying drugs to inmates in each of the last three years:

2007	2008	2009	2010 to date	Total
14	23	35	17	89
Number of Visitor Referrals as a percentage of number of seizures from visitors				
100%	67.6%	31.2%	37.8%	43.4%

However, in addition, in 2010 there have been a further twelve cases resulting from joint Prison Service and Police operations which do not show as referrals since arrest was initiated by the police on site who then referred cases for prosecution. This was a proactive approach by Maghaberry management with the PSNI.

Any visitor caught attempting to supply drugs of any quantity to inmates will be removed from the establishment and referred to Prison Service Headquarters with a recommendation for suspension of visiting rights, and the PSNI may be contacted with a view to the pressing of charges.

The Prison Service takes very seriously its responsibility to prevent illegal drugs entering prisons and has a range of measures in place to provide protection. These include searching of staff and visitors prior to entry, x-ray scanning of certain items of clothing and articles being taken into the prison and the deployment of dogs which are trained to detect illicit drugs.

Visitors to Prisons Supplying Drugs to Inmates

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Justice to detail the number of reports made to the PSNI by the prison authorities of incidents of visitors to prisons supplying drugs to inmates in each of the last three years.
(AQW 621/11)

Minister of Justice: The table below sets out the number of drug seizures from prisoners and visitors in each of the last 3 years:

	2007	2008	2009	2010 to date	Total
Prisoners	405	382	291	176	1254
Visitors	14	34	112	45	205

Table 2 below sets out the number of reports (also expressed as a percentage of the number of seizures) made by prison authorities to the PSNI of incidents of visitors to prisons supplying drugs to inmates in each of the last three years:

2007	2008	2009	2010 to date	Total
14	23	35	17	89
Number of Visitor Referrals as a percentage of number of seizures from visitors				
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However, in addition, in 2010 there have been a further twelve cases resulting from joint Prison Service and Police operations which do not show as referrals since arrest was initiated by the police on site who then referred cases for prosecution. This was a proactive approach by Maghaberry management with the PSNI.

Any visitor caught attempting to supply drugs of any quantity to inmates will be removed from the establishment and referred to Prison Service Headquarters with a recommendation for suspension of visiting rights, and the PSNI may be contacted with a view to the pressing of charges.

The Prison Service takes very seriously its responsibility to prevent illegal drugs entering prisons and has a range of measures in place to provide protection. These include searching of staff and visitors prior to entry, x-ray scanning of certain items of clothing and articles being taken into the prison and the deployment of dogs which are trained to detect illicit drugs.

Closed Prison Visits

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Justice how many closed visits have taken place in each prison in each of the last three years.

(AQW 622/11)

Minister of Justice: The information provided from the Northern Ireland Prison Service records is as below:

Year	Maghaberry Closed Visits	Magilligan Closed Visits	Hydebank Wood Closed Visits	Total
Oct 07 – Sept 08	991	189	92	1272
Oct 08 – Sept 09	714	88	205	1007
Oct 09 – Sept 10	375	75	264	714

Separated Prisoners

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many separated prisoners are currently on remand in Maghaberry Prison; and how many of them have signed up to the separated compact.

(AQW 689/11)

Minister of Justice: On 28 September 2010 there were 21 separated prisoners on remand and one awaiting trial. Every applicant to go into separation signs an application form. If the application meets the criteria and is approved, the compact is read to the prisoner and the prisoner is asked to sign. 17 of the 21 themselves signed the Compact, in respect of the others a Governor endorsed the compact accordingly.

Pitch Incursion

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 233/11, what specific circumstances would constitute a lawful excuse for a pitch incursion.

(AQW 697/11)

Minister of Justice: In the forthcoming Justice Bill, the proposed new offence will recognise that the circumstances in which it may be appropriate and necessary for a person to go on to a pitch without lawful authority can be unpredictable. It will therefore permit, in general terms, incursions with lawful excuse. In practice, such incursions could include one fan seeking to evade a serious attack by another by going on to the pitch, or an individual going on to the pitch to provide medical assistance / first aid.

Pitch Incursion

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Justice how far in advance and by what method of notification must sports match organisers seek authorisation for a pitch incursion; and for his assessment of whether a pitch incursion would be considered a public assembly under the draft Public Assemblies, Parades and Protests Bill.

(AQW 698/11)

Minister of Justice: Under my proposals for legislation, match organisers will themselves determine who should be permitted entry on to the pitch and in what circumstances entry is authorised. I do not believe that a pitch incursion would be considered a public assembly under the draft public assemblies legislation.

Released Prisoners

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Justice what proportion of prisoners released in each of the last three years are recorded as having no fixed abode.

(AQW 700/11)

Minister of Justice: The table below shows the proportion of prisoners recorded as having no fixed abode on discharge within the last three calendar years.

	2007	%	2008	%	2009	%
No fixed abode	242	6.47%	298	8.04%	315	8.46%
Total Discharges	3738		3708		3724	

Non-Molestation Orders

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) the number of convictions for breaches of Non-Molestation Orders in each of the last five years; and (ii) the proportion which resulted in (a) custodial; and (b) non-custodial sentences.

(AQW 701/11)

Minister of Justice: The table below documents the number convicted for the offence 'Breach of Non-Molestation Order' and the percentage given a custodial or non-custodial disposal.

Data cover the calendar years 2002 to 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 convicted for the offence 'Breach of Non-Molestation Order' and percentage given a custodial or non-custodial disposal 2002-2006

Year	Custodial		Non-custodial		Total number convicted
	Number	%	Number	%	
2002	17	7	219	93	236
2003	22	9	217	91	239
2004	24	9	231	91	255
2005	24	9	229	91	253
2006	26	11	219	89	245

Non-Molestation Orders

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Justice how many Non-Molestation Orders were issued in each of the last five years.

(AQW 702/11)

Minister of Justice: Information on the number of Non-Molestation Orders made was not centrally recorded prior to March 2007. Consequently, full year figures are only available from 2008.

In 2008 there were a total of 7759 Orders made and in 2009 there were 7370 Orders made.

Convictions for Hate Crime

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister of Justice to detail the number of convictions for hate crime in each of the last five years; and the average sentence imposed.

(AQW 710/11)

Minister of Justice: Information on the number of convictions for hate crime has only been recorded since March 2007 following the recommendations of the Criminal Justice Inspectorate Report on hate crime published that year.

The table below details the number of convictions for offences aggravated by hostility (hate crime). Given the range of sentences imposed, it is not possible to state an average sentence for hate crime.

Cases are recorded as hate crime where the prosecutor opens this to the court or where the court makes this finding on the evidence presented.

Convictions and Sentences Recorded for Hate Crime

Year	Number of Charges on which Convicted	Sentences Imposed
2007 (Mar-Dec)	4	Imprisonment for 3 months suspended for 2 years and Compensation Payment £1000
		Imprisonment for 2 months suspended for 2 years and Compensation Payment £250
		Imprisonment 6 months
		Imprisonment 8 months

Year	Number of Charges on which Convicted	Sentences Imposed
2008	6	Custody Youth Conference - Detained in Young Offenders Centre (YOC) for 1 month
		Detained in YOC for 4 months
		Youth Conference Order
		Imprisoned for 3 months suspended for 2 years
		Detained in YOC for 4 months suspended for 2 years and Compensation Payment £500
		Detained in YOC for 8 months suspended for 2 years and Compensation Payment £1000
2009	1	Youth Conference Order

Test Purchasing of Alcoholic Beverages at Off-sales Premises

Mr C Lytle asked the Minister of Justice for an update on his Department's review of the test purchasing of alcoholic beverages at off-sales premises.

(AQW 747/11)

Minister of Justice: Section 67 of the Criminal Justice (Northern Ireland) Order 2008 provided the powers for the PSNI to undertake test purchases of alcohol. The Secretary of State issued Guidance to the Chief Constable that stated there would be a formal review one year after test purchase powers are first brought into operation. The PSNI are currently completing the piloting of these powers and when this outcome is known they will commence the full operation of this legislation. Only when these powers have been utilised for one year will a review be carried out.

Convictions in Relation to the Use of Fireworks

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Justice to detail the number of convictions in relation to the use of fireworks in each of the last three years.

(AQW 752/11)

Minister of Justice: The table below gives the number convicted for firework related offences.

Data cover the calendar years 2004 to 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 CONVICTED FOR FIREWORK RELATED OFFENCES¹ 2004-2006

Offence	2004	2005	2006
Unlawful use	1	2	3
Unlawful possession	7	13	15
Unlawful sale ¹	2	1	2
Unlawful purchase	0	1	1

Offence	2004	2005	2006
Total	10	17	21

1 Includes failing to keep proper records of firework sales.

Public Funding for Restorative Justice Schemes

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Justice to detail the level of public funding for restorative justice schemes in each of the last three years.

(AQW 762/11)

Minister of Justice: Funding is provided to two Community-based Restorative Justice (CBRJ) organisations - Northern Ireland Alternatives and Community Restorative Justice Ireland - which manage a total of 16 schemes formally accredited under the Government Protocol for CBRJ Schemes. The amount of public funding provided through DoJ to these bodies in each of the last three financial years is detailed in the table below;

Year	Organisation	Funding (£'s) ¹
2007/08	Community Restorative Justice Ireland	£0
	Northern Ireland Alternatives	£87,575
2008/09	Community Restorative Justice Ireland	£60,814
	Northern Ireland Alternatives	£70,000
2009/10	Community Restorative Justice Ireland	£124,774
	Northern Ireland Alternatives	£113,428

1 Includes funding by DoJ, its arm's length bodies and funding from PSNI disbursed through DoJ.

Sentences for Rape

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Justice what plans he has to increase sentences for rape.

(AQW 774/11)

Minister of Justice: As the maximum sentence available for rape is already life imprisonment, I have no plans to increase sentences for this offence.

District Command and Business Services

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister of Justice to detail the cost of the proposed move of district command and business services from Newtownards to Bangor Police Stations; and the cost of originally establishing district command and business services at Newtownards Police Station after the recent reorganisation of Police districts.

(AQW 830/11)

Minister of Justice: This is an operational matter for the Chief Constable, who is accountable to the Northern Ireland Policing Board. I am committed to respecting the operational independence of the Chief Constable and the role of the Policing Board.

You may therefore wish to direct your question to the PSNI.

Preliminary Enquiries at Magistrates' Courts

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to outline the procedures followed when holding Preliminary Enquiries at Magistrates' Courts before transfer to Crown Court; and whether it is normal practice to hold these enquiries by video-link.

(AQW 993/11)

Minister of Justice: A Preliminary Inquiry (known generally as a "PE") is a procedure whereby a Magistrates' Court undertakes an assessment of the evidence in a case in order to determine whether or not the accused should be committed for trial to the Crown Court.

Before a Preliminary Inquiry can take place, the Public Prosecution Service must give notice of intention to request a Preliminary Inquiry to the relevant Clerk of Petty Sessions and serve a copy of that notice, together with other prescribed documentation, on the accused a reasonable time before the day fixed for the hearing of the Preliminary Inquiry.

At the hearing, the Magistrates' Court will ascertain whether all the required documentation has been served on the accused and, if the accused is not legally represented, the court will also explain the purpose of the proceedings. The charge will then be read to the accused who will be asked whether or not he objects to the holding of a Preliminary Inquiry. The court must be satisfied that the accused understands the effect of proceeding by way of Preliminary Inquiry. Where the accused does not object, he will then be informed of his rights to give evidence, call witnesses or tender any written statements. In practice, however, these rights are rarely exercised and most Preliminary Inquiries proceed on the basis of the written evidence.

During a Preliminary Inquiry, the accused has an opportunity to challenge the sufficiency of the prosecution case. Once all the procedural requirements have been met, the court determines whether or not there is a prima facie case and, if so satisfied, returns the accused for trial to the Crown Court on bail or in custody, as appropriate.

An accused person will normally be present in court for a Preliminary Inquiry. There are, however, certain circumstances in which a Preliminary Inquiry may be conducted without the accused being physically present, for example:

- where he has been transferred to a hospital for treatment for a mental disorder, the court is satisfied that he is unfit to take part in the proceedings, and he is legally represented;
- where he is prevented from effectively participating in the proceedings by reason of his being under 18 or suffering from a mental disorder. In these circumstances, the court may allow an accused to give evidence at a Preliminary Inquiry via live link.

Preliminary Inquiries have also been held by live link in a number of cases at the direction of the District Judge (Magistrates' Courts). I understand this to be with the consent of the parties.

Prisoners Released in Error

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Justice, in light of the revelation that a second prisoner has been released in error, when he was informed of this development; why no public statement was made for up to three days after the event; if any other prisoners have been released in error in the last six months; and what guarantees can the Minister give that this will not happen again before the end of October.

(AQW 1044/11)

Minister of Justice: During the afternoon of Friday 1 October, I was informed by the Director General of the Prison Service of the erroneous release of a second prisoner (Connelly James Cummins) from Downpatrick Crown Court.

No public statement was made until full details were available and confirmed. Mr Cummins was posted as unlawfully at large on the Prison Service Website at lunchtime on Monday 4 October and I briefed the House on the circumstances that afternoon in response to an urgent oral question from Mr Tom Elliott MLA. The Prison Service does not ordinarily issue public statements or post details of remand or

untried prisoners who are unlawfully at large. The exception was made in the case of Mr Cummins and Mr Paliutis because of the unique circumstances under which they were erroneously released.

There have been no other prisoners erroneously released by the Prison Service in the last six months, or - I am advised - for at least 5 years.

As I told the House, I have commissioned an urgent inquiry and I have been assured by the Director General of the Prison Service that measures are already in place to improve procedures. These include a strengthening of staff capability, improved communications from the videolink to the office which authorises release, and additional checks and balances in court holding areas before release is authorised. I am due to receive an interim report next week which will provide a further opportunity to consider very early remedial measures.

I will continue to take a close interest in the progress of the inquiry and keep the House informed.

Department for Regional Development

Rail and Bus Fuel Installation Contracts

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the process for awarding rail and bus fuel installation contracts; and the procedures in place to ensure that unsuccessful tender applicants are notified of the details of the contract awarded.

(AQW 506/11)

Minister for Regional Development (Mr C Murphy): Translink as a Centre of Expertise operates under the Utilities Regulations 2006 for applicable procurement activities over the relevant threshold. For procurements like this one which are under the threshold, Translink conducts procurement activity in line with the principles relating to public procurement laid down by the NI Executive and promoted via Central Procurement Directorate guidance.

With regard to disseminating information to tenderers, Translink have told me that it follows the principles set out in the guidance from the Central Procurement Directorate (CPD) where appropriate. This includes the Procurement Guidance Note 02/08, now replaced by 01/10, relating to Information disclosure throughout the procurement process and the application of the rules on the Standstill Period.

Following these rules and Translink's own information pack it attempts to ensure that applicants are kept informed on issues that are relevant to them at each stage of the tendering process. Specifically unsuccessful tenderers are to be fully advised of the assessment of their tender(s) and relevant scoring.

In the case of the rail and bus fuel installation contracts, after the tenders were evaluated the unsuccessful tenderers were notified on 1 October 2009 of the fact that they had been unsuccessful and of the name of the successful tenderer. Following a reminder from one of the unsuccessful tenderers six days later, they were immediately informed of their scoring in the tender process together with that of the successful tenderer.

As in any procurement particular information, specifically tender values, can be withheld where it would prejudice fair competition between economic operators in the future. I have been told by Translink that the successful tenderer in this case had provided the lowest priced and most economically advantageous tender and none of the unsuccessful tenderers have since invoked Translink's complaints procedure in respect of either of these tenders.

Railway Track between Coleraine and Londonderry

Mr G Campbell asked the Minister for Regional Development to provide a timescale for the improvement and upgrading of the railway track between Coleraine and Londonderry; and the estimated duration of closure for these works.

(AQW 531/11)

Minister for Regional Development: The Economic Appraisal for the Coleraine to Derry Track Renewals project is currently being assessed by DFP to confirm that it demonstrates Value for Money. When that assessment is complete, I will consider giving approval for the project to proceed taking account of available capital funding.

Subject to that approval, the preliminary work is planned to commence in the spring of 2011. At this time the closure of the line between Coleraine is estimated to last for one year beginning in April 2012. However, the start and duration of the closure will be reviewed by Translink when the project receives approval to commence work on site.

CO 71 Contract

Mr G Savage asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) whether NI Water carried out a cost benefit analysis on engaging mechanical and engineering staff as opposed to embedded contract staff under tender contract CO 71, to compare (a) salaries; (b) sick pay; (c) annual leave entitlements; (d) pension entitlements; (e) company vehicle use; (f) training requirements; and (g) personal protective equipment requirements; and (ii) whether the findings of this analysis will be published.

(AQW 555/11)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by NI Water (NIW) that it does not recognise the term “embedded contract staff”. In order to ensure efficient and effective use of its finite resources, NIW continuously review costs and has undertaken an analysis of contract staff employed by a variety of contractors, including those engaged under contract C071. The nature of the analysis is considered to be commercially sensitive and NIW will not be publishing the findings.

NI Water

Mr G Savage asked the Minister for Regional Development how NI Water ensures and monitors that all its staff are treated with dignity in the workplace.

(AQW 556/11)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by NI Water (NIW) that it has a wide range of policies in place to ensure its staff are treated with dignity in the workplace. These include an Equal Opportunities & Diversity policy, a Code of Conduct, a Harassment & Bullying policy, a Health and Wellbeing policy, Grievance procedures and a Discipline policy. In addition, NIW offers staff support through an Employee Assistance Programme and a dedicated Staff Support Officer.

Monitoring takes place through the recording and management of any formal complaints within the above processes together with a quarterly strategic review of all health, safety and well-being issues. Also, an annual staff survey is carried out providing staff the opportunity to feedback on a wide range of workplace issues. The highest scores in this year's survey were in the area of equality in the workplace.

Public Transport for People with a Disability

Mr J Spratt asked the Minister for Regional Development what provision he has made, within his Department's budget, to provide increased access to public transport for people with a disability.

(AQW 564/11)

Minister for Regional Development: The following programmes are supported by my Department to improve access to public transport for people with disabilities:

The Transport Programme for People with Disabilities with an annual budget of £4.6 million provides support to services such as the Shopmobility and the Door to Door transport scheme.

The Rural Transport Fund with an annual budget of £4.75m provides support to 16 Rural Community Transport Partnerships to offer a range of specialised transport services to people with reduced mobility, including those with disabilities, living in rural areas throughout the North.

My Department has also made funding available to enable Translink to improve the accessibility of its services. Over the last three financial years, the Department has provided Translink with more than £74 million for the purchase of new buses and more than £10 million for the upgrading of railway stations and halts, in accordance with the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. In addition, 20 more new trains are being purchased at present at a cost of £114 million, and are expected to be in service by 2013.

Water Charges

Mr J Spratt asked the Minister for Regional Development what (i) exemptions; and (ii) discounts for water charges are available to community groups.

(AQW 566/11)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by NI Water that all non domestic premises are subject to water and sewerage charges and trade effluent charges where applicable, and there are no exemptions from charges or discounts available to community groups.

If a customer is charged on a measured basis and rates are payable on the property, they are entitled to apply for a domestic allowance. If granted, charges will not be applied in each half yearly billing period until consumption exceeds 100 cubic metres for water or 95 cubic metres for sewerage. Unmeasured charges based on the Nett Annual Value of a property continue to be charged to the consumer at 50 percent.

Carshare Scheme in South Belfast

Mr J Spratt asked the Minister for Regional Development how many people participated in the Carshare Scheme in the South Belfast constituency, in the last 12 months.

(AQW 568/11)

Minister for Regional Development: It is not possible to provide information about the number of people participating in my Department's carsharing scheme by constituency, nor over a period of time. However, a search of the www.carshareni.com database on 23 September 2010 indicates that 150 registered members record their journey originating in an area broadly equivalent to the South Belfast constituency.

Railway Track between Coleraine and Londonderry

Mr M Storey asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the upgrade of the Coleraine to Londonderry railway line and the expected completion date for this work.

(AQW 613/11)

Minister for Regional Development: The Economic Appraisal for the Coleraine to Derry Track Renewals project is currently being assessed by DFP to confirm that it demonstrates Value for Money. When that assessment is complete, I will consider giving approval for the project to proceed taking account of available capital funding.

Subject to that approval, the preliminary work is planned to commence in the spring of 2011 with all work completed by March 2013. However, the completion date will be reviewed by Translink when the project receives approval to commence work on site.

Board of NI Water

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) whether a record was kept of conversations between his departmental officials and the Chief Executive of NI Water regarding the withdrawal of the Chief Executive's resignation; (ii) if these discussions prompted the Minister to seek legal advice in relation to the removal of Directors from the Board of NI Water; (iii) if the Minister himself had any discussions with the Chief Executive prior to the withdrawal of his resignation; and (iv) to provide detail of these discussions and any commitments given.

(AQW 619/11)

Minister for Regional Development:

- (i) I have been advised that no record was kept of conversations between my departmental officials and the Chief Executive of NI Water (NIW) regarding the withdrawal of the Chief Executive's resignation.
- (ii) Any discussions that took place did not prompt me to seek legal advice in relation to the removal of Directors from the Board of NIW.
- (iii) I did not have any discussions with the Chief Executive prior to the withdrawal of his resignation.
- (iv) No discussions took place and no commitments were given, therefore I have no detail to disclose.

NI Water

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he is aware that the Chief Executive of NI Water informed the Independent Review Team of NI Water that he was content with the first draft of its report.

(AQW 620/11)

Minister for Regional Development: I was not aware that the Chief Executive of NI Water (NIW) informed the Independent Review Team that he was content with the first draft of its report.

A2 Maydown to City of Derry Airport

Mr M Durkan asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) how much has been spent on the dualling of the A2 Maydown to City of Derry Airport to date; (ii) what is the current estimated cost of the completed project; and (iii) when the works will be completed.

(AQW 624/11)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that a total of £28.6 million has been spent to date on the dualling of the A2 Maydown to City of Derry Airport dualling scheme. This amount includes preparation, land and construction costs. At present, it is estimated that completion of the scheme will cost in the region of £44 million.

The scheme continues to make good progress and is expected to be substantially completed by December 2010.

Independent Review Team of NI Water

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister for Regional Development if he is aware of (i) emails between the Permanent Secretary and the Director of the Shareholder Unit on 16 February 2010 discussing the outcomes that they would require from the Independent Review Team Report into NI Water; (ii) exchanges between officials which included suggestions that the Independent Review Team of NI Water should make recommendations to the Executive regarding water charges.

(AQW 625/11)

Minister for Regional Development:

- (i) I was not aware of emails between the Permanent Secretary and the Director of the Shareholder Unit on 16 February 2010.
- (ii) I was also not aware of exchanges between officials which included suggestions that the Independent Review Team of NI Water (NIW) should make recommendations to the Executive regarding water charges.

Consultants

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister for Regional Development how much was paid to the consultants who continued the work originally contracted out to LLP after the termination of their contract; and to detail the tendering process under which the consultants were engaged.

(AQW 626/11)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that Contracting Out was previously engaged by NIW in relation to 2 discrete pieces of work:

- (i) Advice and assistance in relation to PPP contracts and
- (ii) Advice and assistance in relation to the termination of a commercial contract.

Upon termination of the arrangement with Contracting Out the work described at (i) above has been carried out by the NIW Commercial Contracts Management Team.

As a result of legal proceedings in relation to the termination of the commercial contract referred to at (ii) above, NIW appointed a firm to act as both Expert Witness and Forensic Accountants. This appointment was procured competitively under NIW's professional Services Framework. It is important to note that at no time did Contracting Out act on behalf of NIW as Expert Witness or Forensic Accountant in this matter. The costs incurred by NIW in relation to the Expert Witness and Forensic Accountants' appointment were £390,000.

CO 71 Contract

Mr G Savage asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) whether NI Water embedded contract staff, engaged under the CO 71 contract, are currently licensed to enter confined spaces and wear breathing apparatus, as per the tender specification; and (ii) if not (a) what steps are being taken to enforce this tender requirement; (b) has it been reported to the Health and Safety Executive; and (c) does this situation constitute a breach of contract.

(AQW 652/11)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that as both the Terms and Conditions of Contract CO71 and the day-to-day operation of the Contract are the subject of legal action by a member of the contractor's staff, it would be inappropriate to disclose information in respect of any matters that may impact upon the ongoing litigation or which could in any way help to circumvent the legal process.

Independent Review Team

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister for Regional Development the date on which he and his Department were first advised by the Chairman and Board members of NI Water of their concerns over the independence of the Independent Review Team.

(AQW 661/11)

Minister for Regional Development: On 28 January 2010 the former Chairman of NI Water (NIW), Chris Mellor, wrote to Jackie Henry as a member of the Independent Review Team (IRT) seeking her written assurance about the independence of each member of the IRT. This letter was copied to Paul Priestly who subsequently drew it to my attention the same day.

NI Water

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister for Regional Development, in relation to the NI Water proceedings against Steria, (i) when the legal action was dropped; (ii) how much this action has cost NI Water and the Department; and (iii) how much all cases and settlements with Steria, including legal and other fees, have cost the public purse to date.

(AQW 663/11)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by NI Water (NIW) that the terms of settlement of this matter are confidential between the parties. However, as the Member will be aware, the NI Audit Office has full access to this information as part of the current investigation commissioned by the PAC.

Independent Review Team Report

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the detail of the first draft of the Independent Review Team report.

(AQW 664/11)

Minister for Regional Development: I did not see a draft version of the Independent Review Team report.

Car Parking Companies

Ms D Purvis asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of whether car parking companies or private security firms acting as, or on behalf of, car parking companies could be facilitating a criminal act by allowing drivers to leave closed car parks without paying their parking fee.

(AQW 837/11)

Minister for Regional Development: I am unable to comment in relation to car parks for which my Department is not responsible.

However, my Department's Roads Service is responsible for managing 128 charged car parks, 3 of which are physically closed when the charged hours of the car park finish each day. These car parks are staffed by employees of NSL Services Ltd, which is contracted by Roads Service to manage the charged car parks.

No facility is provided to release vehicles which remain locked in these car parks after closing time, the details of which are clearly signed at the entry points to the car parks. Any vehicles which remain parked overnight in these car parks are charged the relevant tariff for the duration of their stay.

In relation to the matter of facilitating a criminal act, I can confirm that non-payment of the relevant charges within my Department's car parks is not a criminal offence, but is a decriminalised offence through the Traffic Management (Northern Ireland) Order 2005.

Department for Social Development

Mortgage Repayments

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Social Development what help is currently available from his Department for people struggling to make their mortgage repayments.

(AQW 460/11)

Minister for Social Development (Mr A Attwood): The Mortgage Debt Advice Service, delivered by Housing Rights Service was launched in May 2009. 755 clients used this service during its first year in operation. This specialised service is preventing where possible, people here from becoming homeless as a consequence of housing related debt. This year, my Department has allocated additional funding to enable an expanded service to operate up to 31 March 2011.

In Northern Ireland around 14,270 claimants in receipt of Income Support, Income Based Jobseeker's Allowance and Pension Credit also receive Support for Mortgage Interest. The purpose of this assistance is to help them remain in their homes by providing reasonable contribution toward mortgage interest costs in order to secure the home.

Mortgage Rescue Scheme

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the proposed Mortgage Rescue scheme.

(AQW 461/11)

Minister for Social Development: Bids made by my Department in previous monitoring rounds to obtain the funding for a full Mortgage Rescue scheme have been unsuccessful. In the absence of funding to launch the financial-rescue element of the mortgage rescue scheme, I provided funding for Housing Rights to operate a pilot Mortgage Debt Advice Service. This specialised service is preventing where at all possible, people here from becoming homeless as a consequence of housing related debt. It is anticipated that proposals for a Mortgage Rescue Scheme will take two elements: prevention and intervention. The prevention element of the scheme would provide advice to people either facing or actually in arrears to explore the options available to them. The intervention element would potentially help people facing repossession to sell their home either in full or in part to a housing association and then rent it back.

Community Faiths Forum

Mr S Anderson asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the process by which appointments were made to the Community Faiths Forum.

(AQW 547/11)

Minister for Social Development: Invitations to join the Community Faiths' Pilot Forum were formally made by the Churches Community Work Alliance Northern Ireland (CCWA (NI)), the body contracted by the Department for Social Development (DSD) to manage the pilot forum until March 2012. Invitations were issued following consultation with officials from the Voluntary and Community Unit of DSD who have engaged with leaders and members from across a wide range of Northern Ireland churches and faith based organisations as part of their work in the voluntary and community sector over a prolonged period.

The nominations were restricted to active faith practitioners working in faith based social action projects whose working remit was clearly linked to the policy priorities of this Department (tackling poverty, urban regeneration, community development, housing and volunteering). CCWA (NI) worked closely with DSD officials to ensure a wide range of faith based organisations were included in the make up of the pilot forum.

In an effort to identify appropriate appointees from the small minority (non-Christian) faiths, officials sought advice from colleagues in the Race Relations Unit of the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMdfM) to identify individuals from minority faith backgrounds best placed to influence the future involvement of their faith communities in projects designed to tackle disadvantage, exclusion and marginalisation.

I am aware that a concern has been raised about the breadth of representation. People were invited to participate on the basis of the relevance of their experience. Nonetheless, I met with representatives from The Caleb Foundation recently and am looking at ways to broaden participation in the forum.

Community Faiths Forum

Mr S Anderson asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the role to be fulfilled by the pilot Community Faiths Forum.

(AQW 548/11)

Minister for Social Development: The Community Faiths' Forum will provide opportunity for experienced social action practitioners from across a range of faith based organisations to engage in discussion and advise government officials on issues specifically relevant to the work of the Department for Social Development.

The members of the pilot forum will share learning and best practice about the contribution made by faith groups in meeting the needs of our most deprived communities and in new emerging minority

communities. The forum will seek to identify ways faith organisations might seek to become more effective partners with government, public services, private and voluntary sector organisations to increase the support available locally to meet the needs of the disadvantaged, marginalised and excluded people in our community. I believe there may be untapped expertise and potential within the faith community that might be usefully availed of.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr A Ross asked the Minister for Social Development (i) when the term 'for life' was changed to 'indefinitely' in relation to Disability Living Allowance recipients; (ii) to define the meaning of the term 'for life' when it was given; and (iii) if a recipient was previously told he/she would be in receipt of DLA 'for life' whether this status can later be revoked.

(AQW 554/11)

Minister for Social Development:

- (i) The term 'for life' was changed to 'for a indefinite period' by an amendment to the Social Security Contributions and Benefits (Northern Ireland) Act 1992 made by the Welfare Reform and Pensions (Northern Ireland) Order 1999 which came into operation on 12 January 2000. (ii) Awards for life were awards that would continue for the lifetime of the individual subject to the entitlement conditions remaining satisfied. The change to the wording was made because the term 'life award' gave the impression that an award, once given, was immutable. The change had no substantive effect as previously an award could always be reviewed and changed in line with a change in circumstances. (iii) There has been provision to review any award where it becomes apparent that a material change of circumstances has occurred which may affect the rate at which one or both of the components of disability living allowance may be payable.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr J Spratt asked the Minister for Social Development how many people in each constituency are currently in receipt of Disability Living Allowance.

(AQW 580/11)

Minister for Social Development: The information requested is set out in the table below. The figures show the number of claims where Disability Living Allowance was in payment at September 2010.

Parliamentary Constituency	Recipients
Belfast East	8,785
Belfast North	14,665
Belfast South	8,262
Belfast West	17,385
East Antrim	7,201
East Londonderry	8,198
Fermanagh And South Tyrone	9,171
Foyle	13,629
Lagan Valley	7,689
Mid Ulster	10,062
Newry And Armagh	11,988
North Antrim	8,306

Parliamentary Constituency	Recipients
North Down	6,154
South Antrim	7,843
South Down	10,866
Strangford	7,267
Upper Bann	12,722
West Tyrone	12,655
Unallocated Recipients*	1,455
Total	184,303

* Recipients are allocated to a constituency by postcode. In some cases this is not possible, for example, a postcode may be missing, incomplete or incorrectly recorded.

Department's Press and Information Office

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how many staff are currently employed in the his Department's press and information office; and what is the annual salary cost for this office.
(AQW 585/11)

Minister for Social Development: The Department for Social Development has an Information Office which consists of 18 staff and provides a wide range of services one of which includes contact with the press and media. The annual salary cost for Information Office is £536,000.

The DSD Information Office includes external and internal communications, web site development and maintenance, and marketing. By designing literature in-house and providing an events management service, the Marketing Team has saved the Department £77,000 in the last three years.

Housing Executive

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Social Development whether the Housing Executive has a separate press and information office; if so, how many people work there and what is the annual salary cost for this office.
(AQW 586/11)

Minister for Social Development: The Housing Executive does not have a dedicated press office. The Housing Executive has an Information Department providing a wide range of services including contact with the press and media.

Within the Information Department there are eight members of staff, part of whose responsibility is media/press communications. This activity is only part of their remit. The element relating to press office duties has been calculated as some £71k.

External Media Professionals

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Social Development if his Department or any of its agencies have hired external media professionals in an advisory capacity in any of the last three financial years.
(AQW 590/11)

Minister for Social Development: The Department for Social Development have not hired any external media professionals in an advisory capacity in any of the last three years.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Social Development how many current Disability Living Allowance awards have been awarded for (i) an indefinite period; and (ii) a time-limited period.

(AQW 599/11)

Minister for Social Development: At May 2010 there were 184,924 claimants entitled to Disability Living Allowance. Of these (i) 142,054 people were awarded the benefit for an indefinite period, and (ii) 42,870 people were awarded the benefit for a time-limited period.

Child Poverty

Mr D McKay asked the Minister for Social Development what action he is taking to address child poverty.

(AQW 670/11)

Minister for Social Development: I am committed to tackling disadvantage and poverty amongst the most in need within our society. My Department's work therefore includes many programmes and policies aimed at tackling deprivation amongst one of our most vulnerable groups – children and young people. This work includes:

- Providing financial support for parents through the social security system and through the delivery of better child support arrangements;
- Increasing opportunities for children and young people in our most deprived areas through the Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy;
- Raising the standards of housing available for young people and families in both the private rented and social housing sectors;
- Tackling fuel poverty in the most vulnerable households through our Fuel Poverty Strategy; and
- Funding the provision of advice and volunteer services and a range of programmes, such as the areas at risk programme which have a direct impact on the lives of families in most need.

The continuance of the work is crucial if we are to have any hope of improving the live chances of thousands of children and young people across Northern Ireland. I will therefore be seeking to prioritise this and the other work which my Department carries out which impacts on the most disadvantaged through the next Programme for Government and the 2011 – 15 Budget.

Citizens Advice Bureau

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister for Social Development how much funding his Department has allocated to the Citizens Advice Bureau in each of the last five years; and what proportion this represents of the Citizens Advice Bureau's overall budget.

(AQW 675/11)

Minister for Social Development: Funding provided by my Department to the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) regional body, in each of the last five years, is detailed in the answer to AQW 469/11.

It is not possible to determine the proportion DSD funding represents to Citizens Advice Bureau's overall budget for each of the last 5 years as they have not yet published their accounts for 09/10 and 10/11. However, Departmental funding to CAB's regional body for the 06/07, 07/08 and 08/09 financial years would indicate that it represents approximately 52% of their total income.

Housing Executive in Banbridge

Mr J O'Dowd asked the Minister for Social Development how many people have contacted the Housing Executive in Banbridge in the last six months seeking to be rehoused as a result of being intimidated out of their homes.

(AQW 682/11)

Minister for Social Development: In the last six months less than five households contacted the Housing Executive and presented themselves as homeless in Banbridge. The Housing Executive does not routinely confirm the numbers to ensure that the individuals/householders cannot be identified.

Social Security Fraud

Mr J Craig asked the Minister for Social Development for a breakdown, by job type, of people caught carrying out Social Security fraud in the each of the last three years.

(AQW 713/11)

Minister for Social Development: It is not possible to extract from the current benefit fraud systems a breakdown by occupation of people caught committing benefit fraud.

House of Multiple Location Licences

Ms A Lo asked the Minister for Social Development if he will consider building anti-social behaviour clauses into House of Multiple Location licences, as is currently the practise in Scotland, with the option to revoke the licence if anti-social behaviour is not addressed by the licence holder.

(AQW 720/11)

Minister for Social Development: The Housing Executive's Statutory HMO Registration Scheme already provides for special control provisions to be applied in respect of certain areas where there are serious problems associated with anti-social behaviour. Currently the only area specified in the Scheme is the Holylands in South Belfast. These special control provisions allow the Housing Executive to impose conditions of registration on individual HMOs in this area. These conditions include a requirement that a tenancy agreement must include clauses relating to tenant behaviour. A further condition is that proportionate action should be taken to address any anti-social behaviour by an occupant, provided there are sufficient links between the dwelling and the behaviour. Failure to adhere to these conditions could result in individual registrations being refused or revoked. Under the terms of the current registration scheme, it is not possible to denote individual houses to be subject to special control provisions, if they are outside a specified area.

My officials are currently reviewing the operation of the HMO registration scheme. One of the areas being looked at is ways of creating a greater link between individual's anti-social behaviour and the conditions of registration to enable more robust action to be taken in the event of such behaviour and to ensure landlords take responsibility for the proper management of their houses.

Investigations into Events Within the Housing Executive

Mr F McCann asked the Minister for Social Development how many investigations are currently underway into events within the Housing Executive and if the PSNI are involved in the investigations.

(AQW 950/11)

Minister for Social Development: There are currently six investigations into events within the Housing Executive. There are two being investigated by the police, one by the ombudsman and three being conducted through appropriate internal Housing Executive processes.

There are of course, other matters under investigation which impinge on the work of the Housing Executive and which don't raise issues about the conduct of the Housing Executive itself, for example the conduct of tenants or a private landlord.

Northern Ireland Assembly Commission

Assembly Employees Salaries

Mr G Savage asked the Assembly Commission how many Assembly employees earn a higher salary than the First and deputy First Minister; and to list the job title and salary of each of post.

(AQW 553/11)

The Representative of the Assembly Commission (Mr P Ramsey): The salary of the First Minister and deputy First Minister is made up of two distinct elements namely the salary as a Member of the legislative Assembly and an Officer Holders' salary. A Member's salary is £43,101 per annum and the Officer Holders' salary for the First and deputy First Ministers is £71,434 giving a total salary of £114,535 per annum. There are currently no employees of the Assembly Commission who earn a higher salary.

Expenditure for the Assembly Secretariat

Ms S Ramsey asked the Assembly Commission for a breakdown of the amount spent in this mandate by each Directorate of the Assembly Secretariat.

(AQW 634/11)

The Representative of the Assembly Commission (Mr P Ramsey): Expenditure for the Assembly Secretariat is broken down into four distinct categories which are used for expenditure reporting namely Staff Salaries, General Administrative Expenditure (GAE), Non Cash Costs and Capital. Capital projects often encompass more than one Directorate so their costs are not attributed to a specific Directorate. For this reason, the Capital expenditure for this mandate is shown as a total in the table below. Similarly, Non Cash Costs (such as depreciation of assets and notional charges) are not allocated to a specific Directorate. These costs are also shown, in total, below.

The table below is based on the current structure for the Assembly Secretariat (which was introduced in April 2008) up to the end of the 2009/10 financial year. They exclude the costs associated with Members (such as Members' salaries or allowances) except those costs which are incurred on Committee Business.

Assembly Secretariat Expenditure May 2007 – 31 March 2010			
Directorate Name	Salaries	GAE	Total
Director General's Office	£4,786,500	£1,471,500	£6,258,000
Clerking & Reporting	£15,343,400	£941,200	£16,284,600
Resources	£7,684,100	£2,101,600	£9,785,700
Engagement	£7,442,800	£5,758,900	£13,201,700
Facilities	£8,216,000	£17,220,700	£25,436,700
Total Resources	£43,472,800	£27,493,900	£70,966,700
Total Non Cash Costs			£23,954,000
Total Capital			£4,221,000

The entities within each Directorate are as follows;

Directorate	Business Area
Director General's Office	Corporate Policy Unit
	Commission Support & Compliance Unit
	Legal Services
	Internal Audit
	Examiner of Statutory Rules
	Speaker's Office
Clerking & Reporting	Business Office
	Bill Office
	Central Committee Office
	Statutory & Committees
	Official Report (Hansard)
Resources	Finance Office
	HR Office
	Procurement Office
	IS Office
Engagement	Research & Library
	Communications Office
	Outreach & Education
Facilities	Building Services
	Support Services
	Security Services
	Sustainable Development

Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 15 October 2010

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Comprehensive Spending Review

Ms M Ritchie asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the nature of their discussions with the Chancellor of the Exchequer regarding the forthcoming Comprehensive Spending Review; and if they will make a statement on this matter.

(AQW 1114/11)

First Minister and deputy First Minister (Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness): We would refer the Member to the answers given to AQO 242, 243 and 244 provided on Monday 11 October 2010.

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Farm Modernisation Programme

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many farmers to date have benefited from the Farm Modernisation Programme in the North Down area.

(AQW 715/11)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms M Gildernew): To date, Letters of Offer with a total value of £25,650 have been issued to six farm businesses in the North Down Parliamentary constituency under the Farm Modernisation Programme (FMP). Three farm businesses received Letters of Offer with a total value of £30,000 under the Manure Efficiency Technology Sub Programme (METS).

Disallowance of Single Farm Payments

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for a breakdown of the meetings she has had with stakeholders in relation to the European Commission disallowance of Single Farm Payments.

(AQW 730/11)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Since the beginning of this year I have had constructive meetings with Ulster Farmers' Union, the NI Agricultural Producers Association and our 3 MEPs at which the disallowance issue was discussed. I have also kept the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development regularly updated on the matter.

As my Department starts to roll out the new maps under the Land Parcel Identification System improvement exercise, I will engage further with the UFU and NIAPA.

Disallowance of Single Farm Payments

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the extent to which her Department's interpretation of the legislation impacted on the disallowance applied by the European Commission in relation to Single Farm Payments.

(AQW 756/11)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Following my statement on 27 September 2010, in answer to a question from Mr Irwin, I recognised that there was a difference in interpretation between what the Department understood the legislation to mean and the Commission's view.

I explained that the Department was steering a difficult course between the criticism of Members of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development and other Members of being too heavy-handed on farmers and of adopting an attitude, during inspections, that was slightly onerous towards farmers.

I also explained that the Commission's view is that we were not nearly heavy-handed enough and that areas of land that inspectors allowed to be constituted as eligible should not have been.

I explained that was one of the reasons we are dealing with disallowance issues.

I assured the House that ongoing training is available for inspectors and that much work is being done to ensure that we are fully aware of what the Commission wants, that inspectors have available the most up to date technology, and that we are carrying out inspections based on what constitutes eligible land.

I also said that further misunderstandings are likely, where farmers think that an area of land is eligible even though the Commission clearly believes that it is not, but our responsibility is to apply the Commission's rules when paying out its money.

Disallowance of Single Farm Payments

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, given the recent disallowance of Single Farm Payments, what she is doing to ensure a level playing field in terms of the interpretation, application and implementation of European legislation.

(AQW 758/11)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: I already ensure there is a level playing field and will continue to do so. Every year as part of the Single Application process, my Department provides guidance to farmers on the eligibility rules surrounding the Single Farm Payment (SFP) scheme and advice on completing their Single Application form. This guidance reflects the current requirements of EU legislation. The guidance issued to my staff involved in processing applications or carrying out inspections mirrors the guidance that is issued to farmers for that scheme year. These measures are designed to ensure a consistent approach.

Laying Hens Welfare Legislation

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on the implementation of the laying hens welfare legislation.

(AQW 759/11)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Council Directive 99/74/EC, which came into force in July 1999, laid down minimum welfare standards for the protection of laying hens. It banned the installation of new conventional or "battery" cages from January 2003, and the keeping of hens in existing conventional cages from January 2012.

The Council Directive was transposed into domestic legislation here in July 2002 through the Welfare of Farmed Animals (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2002. These amended the Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations (NI) 2000 to prevent the building, or bringing into service for the first time, of any conventional cage system from 1 January 2003; and to prevent the keeping of laying hens in a conventional cage system from 1 January 2012. All producers must comply with the conventional cage

ban from 1 January 2012, and indeed since 2003 all new installations of laying hen systems here must be of the enriched type of cage, free range, barn or organic. At present, conventional cages account for approximately 53% of the north's total laying hen capacity.

I am very appreciative of the difficulties facing some in the egg laying sector in moving to alternative or enriched cage production systems and the poultry sector generally at this time. Following discussions with the industry last year, I looked widely at all options that would be available under the Rural Development Programme to support modernisation in the poultry sector. An existing support measure that can be accessed by the poultry industry generally is the Farm Modernisation Programme (FMP), which provides support for farm businesses to modernise their holdings and improve their production techniques by providing support for plant, machinery and equipment to be selected from a list of eligible items. Tranche 2 of the Farm Modernisation Programme will provide an opportunity for poultry producers to secure funding up to a maximum payment of £4k per successful applicant.

In order to protect producers from illegal production in other Member States after January 2012, I have urged Defra to press the Commission to take action to maintain a level playing field across the EU. The options may include an intra-Community trade ban on eggs produced in conventional cages and amendment of the Egg Marketing Regulations to enable enforcement authorities to identify eggs produced in conventional cages.

Surplus Land

Dr A McDonnell asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail any (i) land; and (ii) property owned by her Department which is currently deemed surplus to requirements, including the location of the land or property and any plans for its disposal.

(AQW 780/11)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The DARD owned land and property which is currently declared surplus to requirements on the Department's Asset Register is set out in the tables below, including the location and plans for disposal:

(I) LAND ONLY

Description	Location	Plans for Disposal
1.73 Hectares	Galgorm Parks, Fenaghy Road, Galgorm, Ballymena, Co Antrim	Options for placing the land onto the open market are currently being investigated.
Tullyhogue Farm 20.23 Hectares	CAFRE Loughry Campus, Cookstown, Co Tyrone	Potential options for the disposal are currently being considered.

(II) PROPERTY

There is no separately listed property (buildings) deemed surplus to requirements but property, as well as land, is included in the Farm Disposals in the table below.

Description	Location	Plans for Disposal
Wilson's Farm 14.57 Hectares	CAFRE Enniskillen Campus, Enniskillen, Co Fermanagh	Currently on the market for sale.
Thornhill Farm 31.17 Hectares	CAFRE Enniskillen Campus, Enniskillen, Co Fermanagh	Sale being finalised.

Salmonella Outbreaks Linked to Duck Eggs

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what advice she has given to local duck flock owners in light of the confirmed reports in the Republic of Ireland linking salmonella outbreaks to the consumption of duck eggs.

(AQW 784/11)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: I am aware that the Food Safety Authority of Ireland is investigating cases of Salmonella Typhimurium DT8 linked to the consumption of duck eggs. My staff have been in close contact with their counterparts in the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in Dublin and the Food Standards Agency here in relation to this issue.

In the north of Ireland, all isolations of Salmonella in animals must be reported to a veterinary inspector of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. Specific advice is issued to any producer who has, or is suspected to have, salmonella on their premises.

A booklet 'Code of Practice for the Prevention and Control of Salmonella in Poultry Produced for Human Consumption', which includes biosecurity advice to reduce the risk of infection to poultry, is issued to all affected flocks and is also available on the DARD website.

My Department has a long-standing commitment to promoting biosecurity messages. These take the form of leaflets, advertising, press articles, posters, DARD website updates, and meetings with farmers and with Private Veterinary Practitioners.

In 2004 the Department issued all livestock and poultry keepers with a copy of the 'Biosecurity Code for NI Farms', which also included guidance for official visitors and recreational users of farms. This is a voluntary code issued in conjunction with the north's industry. The booklet is also available on request or from the DARD website.

Divisional Veterinary Office in Newry

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether any staff were dismissed during the period of the enquiry into staff morale in the Divisional Veterinary Office in Newry.

(AQW 785/11)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: During the period of the review of working relationships in the administration team in Glenree House Newry, one member of staff was dismissed from that office but these two matters are unrelated.

Land Parcel Identification System

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she appointed any farmers or landowners to the teams selected to carry out the mapping process associated with the Land Parcel Identification System.

(AQW 786/11)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: No. The maps will be improved by Land and Property Services (LPS). DARD staff are working very closely with LPS to ensure that they are fully aware of DARD's rules regarding eligibility for area based schemes as well as EU mapping requirements.

As my Department starts to roll out the new maps under the Land Parcel Identification System improvement exercise, I will engage further with the UFU and NIAPA.

Department's Headquarters

Mr B McElduff asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she will actively consider Omagh as a suitable location for her Department's headquarters.

(AQW 788/11)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The current DARD Headquarters building, Dundonald House, is nearing the end of its useful life and I anticipate that alternative accommodation will be required during the forthcoming Budget period. That presents an opportunity to consider the benefits of ensuring that public sector jobs are available in rural communities, outside central Belfast

It is too early in the process to identify a specific location for any new Headquarters. If funding is secured, full consideration will be given to a suitable location, and the costs and benefits as part of a formal business case.

Department Staff

Mr B McElduff asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many permanent staff in her Department were based in Omagh in each of the last three years.

(AQW 790/11)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The total number of permanent staff employed by my Department and based in Omagh in each of the last 3 years is as follows:

April 2008	165
April 2009	173
April 2010	172

Sudden Oak Death

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to explain the Forestry Service's delay in felling trees in woodland areas infected by Sudden Oak Death.

(AQW 796/11)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: There has been no delay in Forest Service actions to manage the outbreak of *Phytophthora Ramorum* (Sudden Oak Death) in woodland in the north of Ireland, including tree felling operations.

P. Ramorum was confirmed for the first time in a plantation in the north, on the Antrim plateau on the 10 August 2010. Forest Service re-prioritised their harvesting operations and commenced felling on this site within a week of receiving confirmation.

Since 10 August actions taken have included defining areas of affected Japanese Larch Woodland, with areas being measured and divided into felling coupes to control the management of harvesting operations within the affected forests. As the total area to be felled extends to over 200 ha, which represents a very significant undertaking, detailed felling plans have been developed to ensure felling is completed as quickly as possible.

Felling is now being carried out at three confirmed Forest Service affected sites including both mature trees and juvenile crops.

Felling is being prioritised in areas of highest risk and this is monitored on a weekly basis. All work is being carried out in line with plant health measures that have been put in place on a risk based approach, taking account of the most up-to-date scientific advice.

Bio-security precautions are in place in the infected areas to prevent further spread. During the harvesting of infected areas of Japanese larch, further plant health control arrangements are followed by forest operators to minimise the risk of spreading the disease from infected sites on footwear, clothing, vehicles, tools and equipment.

I am content that this disease outbreak is being managed appropriately, in line with Departmental procedures, meeting all required plant health measures with a strong emphasis on prioritising the felling of trees in the highest risk areas.

Sudden Oak Death

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what extra resources she has sought and directed to the Forestry Service to curb the outbreak of Sudden Oak Death.

(AQW 797/11)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: My Department has instigated a “Contingency Plan for Serious Pest/Plant Health Incidents” and regular Incident Management Team meetings have taken place. Although the situation is not currently classed as requiring a major emergency response, as a precautionary measure, and in line with the Major Emergency Response Plan, the gold/silver/bronze command structure has now been introduced to manage the outbreak. This includes the co-ordination of resources from across the Department.

Inspection and surveillance of all Forest Service larch sites have been increased, and since confirmation of the disease, Forest Service has inspected all of its woodlands across the north of Ireland, which include components of Japanese Larch.

Surveys have also been conducted within a 3km zone around the original confirmed sites. In addition to ground inspections, the Department has also conducted an aerial survey across its forest estate on 20 and 21 September. As a result of this targeted surveillance, a small number of additional sites are being investigated further.

Resources involved with the normal harvesting operations have also been re-prioritised to concentrate felling in affected areas as quickly as possible. Felling is now being carried out at three confirmed Forest Service affected sites including both mature trees and juvenile crops.

My officials organised two separate stakeholder meetings which provided an opportunity to brief key stakeholders of the Department’s approach to dealing with the disease outbreak as well as informing them of how they could assist in preventing spread of the disease. These meetings included a wide range of interests including representatives from trade organisations, timber processors, private woodland owners and environmental organisations.

My Department has utilised resources to remind all woodland owners and managers to remain vigilant for symptoms of the disease in Japanese Larch and report suspicious symptoms to Forest Service.

I am committed to staying on top of this developing situation and taking the necessary action to ensure that our woodlands are protected and can continue to provide the environmental, economic, and public access benefits that we all enjoy.

I am satisfied that appropriate resources are currently being deployed by the Department in managing this disease outbreak but I will continue to monitor the situation and utilise resources as necessary in line with any future developments.

Tractor Theft

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the current level of tractor theft.

(AQW 843/11)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: I am aware that the instances of theft on farms are increasing with tractors, small and large items of equipment and livestock being stolen. This increase is causing concern amongst the farming community and I have met with the Justice Minister and the Chief Constable to discuss such thefts and other aspects of Rural Crime. I would also encourage farmers to ensure that they secure their properties and take steps to minimise the risk of theft from their farms.

Proposed Biomass Plant at Glenavy

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what representations her Department has made in relation to the planning application for the proposed biomass plant at Glenavy. (AQW 844/11)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: I wrote to the Minister for the Environment earlier this year to express my view that a public enquiry was the appropriate way forward on the planning application for the proposed biomass power plant at Glenavy.

My ministerial responsibilities span both poultry farmers who have poultry litter to dispose of and those who live in the rural community around Glenavy. I am eager that the views and concerns of farmers, local residents and all those potentially affected by the proposed plant are taken into consideration.

The poultry sector is a significant part of our local agriculture industry and it is important that we seek an agreed way to ensure its future sustainability and protect the interests of poultry farmers as well as the wider community.

As a consultee in the planning process, my Department has provided advice on its areas of expertise at the request of Planning Service.

Animal Neglect

Mr D McClarty asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development in light of the rescue of 70 horses near Mallusk by the Ulster Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, what steps he is taking to ensure that the relevant local authorities have sufficient legal powers to prosecute for animal neglect, as is the case in the rest of the UK. (AQW 854/11)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Under the existing Welfare of Animals Act (NI) 1972 it is an offence to cause an animal any unnecessary suffering. Inspectors from my Department enforce this legislation in respect of unnecessary suffering to livestock on agricultural land and the PSNI has responsibility for enforcement in respect of cruelty offences to horses and other animals not on agricultural land.

I am currently bringing forward a new Welfare of Animals Bill which will introduce a duty of care in respect of all protected animals, which are all animals under the control of man. The Bill will provide new enforcement powers to allow action to be taken to prevent animals from unnecessary suffering, as opposed to the current legislation which allows action to be taken only when the animal has actually suffered. The Bill will provide powers for either a Department or District Council inspector or constable who finds a protected animal that is suffering, or is likely to suffer if its circumstances do not change, to take immediate steps to alleviate the animal's suffering.

The new Welfare of Animals Bill was introduced to the Assembly in June 2010 and is currently at Committee stage. Subject to the Bill completing the necessary legislative process, it is my intention to have the Bill enacted early next year.

The powers sought in the new Bill to prevent unnecessary suffering are similar to powers that exist in England and Wales under the Animal Welfare Act 2006 and Scotland under the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006.

City of Culture 2013 in Derry

Mr R McCartney asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she has identified any funding from her Department's budget to be allocated to the City of Culture 2013 in Derry; and if so, how much and for what specific purpose, projects or programmes in the City of Culture is this money intended. (AQW 857/11)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: No funding has been identified for allocation to the City of Culture 2013.

Ulster Camogie Council

Mr D Kennedy asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what action her Department has taken in respect of the review undertaken by the DARD Central Investigation Service into the financial affairs of the Ulster Camogie Council, as detailed in the NI Audit Office Report published on 7 July 2010. **(AQW 1075/11)**

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The involvement of DARD Central Investigation Service (CIS) in an issue relating to the Ulster Camogie Council has been on the basis of an agreed Service Level Agreement where the services and expertise of CIS are made available to DCAL for issues that may arise requiring investigative advice or action. Any investigation into allegations made about funding to UCC, the outcome of such an investigation, the detail of any report, outcomes, recommendations and lessons learned are a matter for the DCAL Minister.

Drainage in Burnview Terrace

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the reasons for the delay in the publication of the Rivers Agency report on the drainage in Burnview Terrace, Banbridge following the flooding incident in August 2008. **(AQW 1105/11)**

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Burnview Terrace, Banbridge was one of a number of areas affected by the August 2008 flood which was the largest event in decades. As a result Rivers Agency undertook a large number of studies to examine the options to reduce the risk of further flooding in the affected areas across the north. These studies have progressed as quickly as reasonably practicable.

In respect of Burnview Terrace I am pleased to advise that a draft report has been produced and my officials anticipate that they will be in a position to inform residents and their public representatives of the outcome of the study in November 2010.

Ulster Camogie Council

Mr D Kennedy asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the current status of the DARD Central Investigation Service investigation into the financial affairs of the Ulster Camogie Council. **(AQW 1112/11)**

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The involvement of DARD Central Investigation Service (CIS) in an issue relating to the Ulster Camogie Council has been on the basis of an agreed Service Level Agreement where the services and expertise of CIS are made available to DCAL for issues that may arise requiring investigative advice or action. Any investigation into allegations made about funding to UCC, the outcome of such an investigation, the detail of any report, outcomes, recommendations and lessons learned are a matter for the DCAL Minister

Weather-aid Payments to Farmers and Growers

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if she will re-submit a bid in the next monitoring round to secure funding to provide weather-aid payments to farmers and growers who lost livestock and crops as result of last winter's adverse weather conditions. **(AQW 1158/11)**

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: I intend to resubmit the bid in the December monitoring round.

Unfortunately the bids I submitted in the June and September Monitoring rounds for £1.1 million, in respect of hardship payments for farmers who suffered crop and sheep losses as a consequence of this year's severe weather, were unsuccessful.

In the current economic climate, DARD, along with other Government Departments will continue to face significant financial constraints. In these circumstances, future consideration by the Executive of hardship payment is unlikely.

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

Rural Libraries

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to list all rural libraries currently in operation; and what he is doing to protect them from closure.

(AQW 731/11)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr N McCausland): In acknowledging the absence of any generally accepted definition of 'rural' in Northern Ireland, an inter-departmental Urban/Rural Definition Group was established to identify and delineate settlements. This group recommended that settlements with a population of less than 4,500 should be regarded as 'rural'.

In relation to this answer the settlements-based definition outlined above has been used and population figures, relating to each library area, were determined from the 2001 census.

The following is a list of rural libraries currently in operation

Broughshane	Dromore	Kells & Connor	Newtownstewart
Carnlough	Dungiven	Kilrea	Portaferry
Castlederg	Fintona	Killyleagh	Portglenone
Castlewellan	Fivemiletown	Lisnaskea	Rathfriland
Crumlin	Garvagh	Maghera	Richill
Crossmaglen	Gilford	Moirra	Saintfield
Cushendall	Irvinestown	Moneymore	Tandragee
Draperstown	Keady	Moy	Whitehead

I am aware of the important contribution that the public library service makes to rural communities and I remain fully committed to the provision of a comprehensive rural library service throughout Northern Ireland. However, given the likelihood of projected budget reductions across Government Departments the Board and Senior Management Team of Libraries NI will have to consider how the library service to rural communities can be most effectively managed within available resources.

Rural Libraries

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for a breakdown of the investment that has been made in each rural library in each of the last three years.

(AQW 732/11)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: In acknowledging the absence of any generally accepted definition of 'rural' in Northern Ireland, an inter-departmental Urban/Rural Definition Group was established to identify and delineate settlements. This group recommended that settlements with a population of less than 4,500 should be regarded as 'rural'.

In relation to this answer the settlements-based definition outlined above has been used and population figures, relating to each library area, were determined from the 2001 census.

The following table shows the recurrent and capital investment in each rural library in each of the last three years.

	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
Broughshane	£338	£7,233	0
Carnlough	£5,376	£5,840	£4,865
Castlederg	£3,642	£1,302	0
Castlewellan	£4,015	£10,998	0
Crossmaglen	£62	£2,120	0
Crumlin	£102,705	£5,874	0
Cushendall	£487	£6,619	0
Draperstown	£673	£4,760	0
Dromore	£1,537	£19,836	0
Dungiven	£1,841	£87,686	£427,523
Fintona	£375	£4,793	£5,032
Fivemiletown	£4,699	£3,179	0
Garvagh	£1,300	£7,153	0
Gilford	£1,563	£4,818	£1,159
Irvinestown	£4,065	£1,611	£1,500
Keady	£1,253	£1,215	£106,496
Kells & Connor	£473	£5,358	0
Killyleagh	£2,024	£25,944	0
Kilrea	£423	£5,344	0
Lisnaskea	£3,835	£14,631	£2,100
Maghera	£1,961	£1,859	£500
Moirá	£995	£1,514	0
Moneymore	£953	£3,690	£6,161
Moy	£1,471	£2,347	0
Newtownstewart	£43,144	£256,919	£307,328
Portaferry	£4,614	£4,327	£500
Portglenone	£40,308	£4,989	0
Rathfriland	£1,624	£1,000	£2,219
Richill	£1,798	£1,740	£3,756
Saintfield	£4,714	£2,312	0
Tandragee	£6,320	£3,805	£458
Whitehead	£6,517	£23,421	£355,721

There has also been £15,000 spent on mobile library provision in the last three years. Mobile libraries are vital in providing services to rural communities that have limited access to a static library.

Figures for 2009/10 were provided by Libraries NI and figures prior to 2009/10 were provided by the Education and Library Boards

Nelson McCausland MLA

Surplus Land

Dr A McDonnell asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail any (i) land; and (ii) property owned by his Department which is currently deemed surplus to requirements, including the location of the land or property and any plans for its disposal.

(AQW 778/11)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Currently DCAL has no property that is deemed surplus to requirements.

However it is expected that following the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland's (PRONI) relocation in 2011 to new accommodation in the Titanic Quarter, Belfast, its Buildings & site at 66 Balmoral Avenue, Belfast will become surplus to requirements.

Commonwealth Games

Mr B McElduff asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the cost of sending local athletes to the Commonwealth Games in Delhi, including flight and accommodation costs.

(AQW 793/11)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The Northern Ireland Commonwealth Games Council (NICGC) is responsible for meeting the costs of sending local athletes to the Commonwealth Games in Delhi. Sport Northern Ireland (SNI), however, which is responsible for the development of sport in Northern Ireland including the distribution of funding, has offered support to NICGC of up to £40,000 from its Athlete Support Programme (ASP) towards presenting the team in Delhi.

City of Culture 2013 in Derry

Mr R McCartney asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether he has identified any funding from his Department's budget to be allocated to the City of Culture 2013 in Derry; and if so, how much and for what specific purpose, projects or programmes in the City of Culture is this money intended.

(AQW 858/11)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: No funding has been allocated to the City of Culture 2013 in Londonderry from my Department at this stage.

Bidding cities were made aware, through guidance provided by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport, that no new government funding was available to cities through the programme.

A capital bid for £20.7m for an Art Gallery at the Ebrington site has been submitted as part of the Budget 2010 exercise.

Significant investment in the arts infrastructure in the North West has already been made by the Department through the North West Challenge Fund which delivered a number of key projects such as the refurbished Playhouse and Waterside Theatres and the new Cultúrlann Uí Chanáin Irish Language Arts and Cultural Centre.

Museum Sector

Mr D O'Loan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, given the contribution by the museum sector to the tourism product and to visitor numbers from outside Northern Ireland, to outline the level

of funding allocated to the museum sector in the current financial year and the level of funding planned for the future.

(AQW 920/11)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The table below details the information requested for those areas of the museum sector funded by DCAL in the current financial year. The level of funding planned for the future will not be available until the outcome of the Comprehensive Spending Review is known.

	Resource (Cash) £000s	Resource (Non-Cash) £000s	Capital £000s
National Museums Northern Ireland	13,565	3,987	3,411
Northern Ireland Museums Council	279	NIL	NIL
Somme Museum	30	NIL	NIL
Total	13,874	3,987	3,411

Patrols Undertaken in Lough Neagh

Mr D Kinahan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the number of (i) patrols undertaken in Lough Neagh; (ii) incidents in which netting has been recovered; and (iii) prosecutions that have resulted from these incidents, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 946/11)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The table below provides details of the number of boat patrols undertaken on Lough Neagh, the amount of netting recovered and the number of resultant prosecutions in each of the last five years:

Year	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Boat Patrols	61	32	38	17	57
Total nets forfeited	17,300yds	10,250yds	3,770yds	330yds	10,100yds
Persons prosecuted	0	2	3	3	7

The Fisheries Conservancy Board was responsible for the enforcement of fisheries protection legislation until 1 June 2009, but it did not record details of every individual net seized due to the large numbers involved and the significant increase in the cost of obtaining destruction orders. Therefore the figure for total nets forfeited (seized and later subject to a destruction order) is provided.

River Warden and Bailiff Positions

Mr D Kinahan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she would consider opening up the positions of river warden and bailiff to trained volunteers.

(AQW 947/11)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: DCAL currently encourage angling clubs to appoint Private Water Bailiffs who are trained volunteers, in compliance with Section 170 (1) (b) of the Fisheries Act (NI) 1966 as amended.

Private Water Bailiffs Information Seminars for angling clubs were held by DCAL during 2010 with the support of the Ulster Angling Federation. The main aim of the seminars was to provide Private Water Bailiffs with information and guidance on how to carry out their duties under the 1966 Fisheries Act.

The seminars were well attended by the angling community. Each attendee was given a "Practical Guide to Water Bailiffing"

2010 Ryder Cup

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure if he intends to hold a reception for Northern Ireland's Ryder Cup winning golfers Graeme McDowell and Rory McIlroy.

(AQW 980/11)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I have already written to Northern Ireland's Ryder Cup winning golfers Graeme McDowell and Rory McIlroy and also to Vice-Captain Darren Clarke to congratulate them following Europe's tremendous victory in the 2010 Ryder Cup at Celtic Manor, Wales. I have asked my officials to take forward the arrangement of a reception at the earliest possible date to celebrate this outstanding achievement.

2010 Ryder Cup

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what plans he has to recognise the achievements of Rory McIlroy and Graeme McDowell in the 2010 Ryder Cup.

(AQW 1016/11)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I have already written to Rory McIlroy and Graeme McDowell and also to Vice-Captain Darren Clarke to congratulate them for the roles they played in Europe's tremendous victory in the 2010 Ryder Cup at Celtic Manor, Wales. I have also asked my officials to take forward the arrangement of a reception at the earliest possible date to celebrate this outstanding achievement.

Shared Stadium for Association Football and Rugby

Mr C Lyttle asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (i) whether the option of a shared stadium for Association Football and Rugby was ever considered, as a part of the business planning process or separately, by consultants or other people involved in the process; (ii) if this option was assessed or costed; (iii) to detail the costings for all options of stadia, including the shared stadium option; and (iv) on what basis the shared option was not pursued or considered viable.

(AQW 1189/11)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I would refer the Member to the reply I gave to him on 4th October 2010 to AQW 739/11. For your convenience the answer is detailed below:

"As the draft Outline Business Case on regional stadium provision for football, rugby and Gaelic games is currently under consideration by my Department it would be inappropriate for me to provide any of the detail you have requested".

New International Stadium for Football

Mr C Lyttle asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken on the funding of a new international stadium for football, both in terms of gender and in relation to the significant and ongoing endowment that such public expenditure could bring to Linfield Football Club as the owners of the prospective stadium site.

(AQW 1251/11)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: An Equality Impact Assessment for capital projects is normally carried out following Outline Business Case approval when decisions on a way forward have been agreed and prior to the allocation of funding. The draft Outline Business Case on regional stadium provision for football, rugby and Gaelic games is still under consideration by my Department, consequently, no Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken.

Nevertheless, the situation relating to Linfield Football Club would not be considered as part of an Equality Impact Assessment, which assesses the likely impact of policy against the criteria within the Section 75 legislation.

Commemoration Events

Mr F Molloy asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline any significant dates that will be marked as part of forthcoming commemoration events and what consultation his Department will carry out to ensure a comprehensive and inclusive approach to each event.

(AQO 275/11)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The Department does not commemorate historic events directly and has no specific budget for this activity.

In my discussions with Arms Length Bodies (ALBs) and the Public Records Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI) I have specified what I see as the key strategic themes for forthcoming commemorations in Northern Ireland namely Plantation, Titanic and 100th anniversaries for the decade 1912-1922. I have encouraged the ALBs and PRONI to facilitate those in the community who are interested in organising events linked to the key themes in a way that delivers value for money, builds knowledge and understanding and contributes positively to a shared and better future.

DCAL Officials will be briefing the Culture Arts and Leisure Committee on this issue on 4 November 2010.

Irish Language Legislation

Mr P Maskey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for his assessment of the correspondence from the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission dated 17 August 2010, which states that failure to introduce Irish language legislation is 'not human rights compliant'.

(AQO 276/11)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I sought legal advice on this issue and have been advised that the judgement underlying the opinion put forward by the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission has no direct relevance to the introduction of an Irish Language Act in Northern Ireland.

As I understand it, the Barankevich case quoted by the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission is about freedom of religious assembly and so is not directly relevant to language rights.

Furthermore, it must be remembered that Article 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights does not give a right to a Language Act or even to the use of a language. It merely says that the enjoyment of the other rights and freedoms in the Convention shall be secured without discrimination on the ground of language.

I believe that the lack of consensus on the issue of legislation for the Irish language would be detrimental to the protection and promotion of the language in the context of a Shared Future, and I believe that the best way forward for both minority languages in Northern Ireland is through the Strategy for Regional or Minority Languages.

Ulster-Scots Academy Project

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on the Ulster-Scots Academy project.

(AQO 277/11)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I recently set up an Ulster-Scots Project Steering Group to give new focus to the task of establishing an Ulster-Scots Academy.

A refresh of the existing business case for an academy will be completed shortly.

I see this project as a priority that must be implemented to ensure that the political commitment by HM Government is delivered and that the Ulster-Scots sector is given the same respect and recognition as the Irish language sector.

The project will have a strong cultural focus. It will have a substantial impact on the creative industries and cultural tourism produce in Northern Ireland. The importance of cultural tourism to the future of

our economy and the potential untapped market that exists was evidenced during my recent trip to the United States.

World Police and Fire Games in 2013

Mr K McCarthy asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline the preparations being made for the World Police and Fire Games in 2013.

(AQO 278/11)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I am delighted that the Northern Ireland Executive at its meeting on Thursday 9th September 2010 agreed in principle to support the 2013 World Police and Fire Games in Northern Ireland up to the cost of £6.04m subject to the normal budgetary processes being followed. These Games are probably the most significant event ever to be hosted in Northern Ireland.

A Business Case which includes a recommended delivery mechanism for implementing the 2013 World Police and Fire Games has been commissioned and referred to DFP for approval.

In addition officials from my Department have also corresponded with DFP detailing the proposed structure and governance and accountability arrangements to be put in place in relation to the delivery vehicle.

In the interim a 2013 Stakeholder Group, chaired by DCAL and incorporating key stakeholders from the Police Service for Northern Ireland, NI Prison Service, NI Fire and Rescue Service, Belfast City Council and Sport NI, is managing the 2013 World Police and Fire Games project until such times as a delivery vehicle is established.

The Stakeholder Group has identified and taken forward preparatory work on various workstreams including Volunteering, Tourism, Legacy, Transport and Logistics and Sport for the planning and organisation of the Games in conjunction with relevant external bodies.

My officials are also liaising with DFP in regard to the Business Case.

Community Arts Sector Jobs

Mr M McLaughlin asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how he intends to protect jobs in the community arts sector in the current economic downturn.

(AQO 279/11)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Once the Northern Ireland Executive has announced the final allocations for all the Northern Ireland Departments, I will give due consideration to the allocations of funding to all spending areas falling within my Department's remit. In doing so I will take account of the impact such allocations will have across the whole arts sector.

Windsor Park, Casement Park and Ravenhill

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what plans he has to upgrade Windsor Park, Casement Park and Ravenhill.

(AQO 280/11)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The provision of fit-for-purpose stadiums for Football, Rugby and Gaelic games is a priority for my department and one which I have publically endorsed.

Given the current condition of the existing stadiums it was considered vital that a cost-effective, sustainable, and affordable way of assisting the three sports develop solutions to their regional stadium needs was found. To address this deficit the Governing Bodies of Football, Rugby and Gaelic games were asked to provide their options on stadium provision to meet their long-term strategic needs.

Through Sport NI my department appointed consultants to undertake the Outline Business Case (OBC) to examine the sports' preferred options, variations around those options and two-sport options. The

OBC, having assessed the proposals, together with other options concluded that the most economically advantageous options for regional stadium development within each sport is:

- Rugby: To redevelop the remaining three sides of Ravenhill to accommodate 15,000 spectators.
- Gaelic games: Complete redevelopment of Casement Park to a maximum spectator capacity of 40,000. This will involve the demolishing the existing stadium and building new on site.
- Football: Redevelop Windsor Park to accommodate 18,000 spectators through a significant refurbishment of the North Stand and West Stand and the redevelopment of the East and South stands.

The proposals meet the departmental/Ministerial and Executive aim of meeting the strategic stadium needs of the sports. In addition the consultants have looked at the Governing Bodies' proposals in the context of wider government strategies in respect of health, infrastructure development, urban and neighbourhood renewal, social inclusion and cohesion and equality.

With regards to funding of the proposals, the consultant's examination of the various stadium options was predicated on an indicative £110m being available to Government as its contribution toward the overall capital costs. This was the expenditure figure which the Executive Committee noted in June 2009 as being the level of funding required to progress the process in which my Department is currently embarked.

I am of course conscious of the impending outcome of the Comprehensive Spending Review and, as for any of my department's activities, funding will be subject to the normal budgetary and approval procedures. The proposals are currently the subject of consideration by DFP.

Ultimately, it will be an Executive decision as to whether the required funding can be found to enable the long-standing and much debated issue of stadium provision to be satisfactorily resolved. I am concerned about the upcoming budget particularly with regards the proposed reduction in capital spend. The Executive will have tough decisions to make and I recognise the challenges they face.

Funding for Stadia for Football, GAA and Rugby

Mr C Lyttle asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on the funding for stadia for football, GAA and rugby.

(AQO 281/11)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The provision of fit-for-purpose stadiums for Football, Rugby and Gaelic games is a priority for my department and one which I have publically endorsed.

Given the current condition of the existing stadiums it was considered vital that a cost-effective, sustainable, and affordable way of assisting the three sports develop solutions to their regional stadium needs was found. To address this deficit the Governing Bodies of Football, Rugby and Gaelic games were asked to provide their options on stadium provision to meet their long-term strategic needs.

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Stadium Provision for GAA, Ulster Rugby and the Irish Football Association

Mr P Doherty asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on his Department's plans to assist the GAA, Ulster Rugby and the Irish Football Association in meeting their long-term strategic needs in relation to stadium provision.

(AQO 282/11)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The provision of fit-for-purpose stadiums for Football, Rugby and Gaelic games is a priority for my department and one which I have publically endorsed.

Given the current condition of the existing stadiums it was considered vital that a cost-effective, sustainable, and affordable way of assisting the three sports develop solutions to their regional stadium needs was found. To address this deficit the Governing Bodies of Football, Rugby and Gaelic games were asked to provide their options on stadium provision to meet their long-term strategic needs.

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Department of Education

Annual Cost of Each Education Sector

Mr M Storey asked the Minister of Education to detail the annual cost of each education sector in each of the last ten years.

(AQW 799/11)

Minister of Education (Ms C Ruane): Tá an méid iomlán de chaiteachas athfhillteach tarmhligthe agus neamhtharmhligthe i ngach ceann de na hearnálacha scoile i ngach bliain de na 10 mbliana airgeadais idir 2000/01 agus 2009/10 le fáil sa tábla thíos.

The total amount of delegated and non-delegated recurrent expenditure in each of the school sectors during each of the 10 financial years from 2000/01 to 2009/10 is shown in the table below.

TOTAL DELEGATED AND NON-DELEGATED RECURRENT EXPENDITURE £MILLION

Sector	2000/01	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
Controlled Sector (Excluding Controlled Integrated and Controlled Grammar)	316.0	338.6	353.1	371.9	372.5	396.8	403.9	423.5	441.8	450.4
Integrated Sector (Grant- Maintained Integrated & Controlled Integrated)	40.5	44.4	48.8	55.2	59.8	66.7	72.7	79.1	86.7	89.8
Grammar Sector (Voluntary Grammar & Controlled Grammar)	184.9	202.3	208.4	223.8	232.8	249.2	257.1	269.1	280.6	286.7
Maintained Sector	330.0	358.2	373.4	389.8	397.5	427.8	434.1	455.9	473.1	490.1
Irish Medium Sector	3.8	4.3	5.1	6.1	6.3	7.8	8.4	9.6	10.9	11.4

Footnotes:

- (i) Expenditure in relation to Grant-Maintained Integrated schools for 2009/10 financial year is still provisional pending validation by the Department.
- (ii) Expenditure included for BELB and SEELB schools in respect of 2009/10 financial year is still provisional.

- (iii) Expenditure in relation to Irish-medium Units, attached to English-medium host schools has not been provided within the Irish Medium sector data as it is not possible to disaggregate the expenditure of the Unit from the host school, for example, where shared services and resources are utilised.
- (iv) In relation to the 2002/03 and 2003/04 financial years, it has not been possible to disaggregate amounts of capital expenditure paid across the sectors within Southern Education and Library Board (£453k and £75k respectively).

Free Bus Pass for Children

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Education (i) to outline the criteria used to determine whether a child is entitled to a free bus pass for travelling to school and whether eligibility is based on the child's home address or the nearest bus stop; and (ii) how many children currently hold a free bus pass.

(AQW 814/11)

Minister of Education: Tá na Boird Oideachais agus Leabharlann freagrach as an scéim iompair baile go scoil a riar.

- (i) Tá páiste i dteideal cúnamh iompair mura bhfuil aon scoil fhóirsteanach suite laistigh den fhad cáilitheach nó má diúltaíodh áit i ngach scoil fhóirsteanach atá suite laistigh den fhad cáilitheach dó. Is é an fad cáilitheach do dhaltai bunscoile ná 2 mhíle agus is é an fad do dhaltai iarbhunscoile ná 3 mhíle.

The Education and Library Boards are responsible for administering the home to school transport scheme.

- (i) A child is entitled to transport assistance if there is no suitable school within the qualifying distance of their home or they have been refused a place in all suitable schools within the qualifying distance. The qualifying distances are 2 miles for primary pupils and 3 miles for post-primary pupils.

A suitable school is defined solely as one in the recognised categories of controlled, integrated, Irish-medium, maintained, denominational or non-denominational grammar. The qualifying distance is measured from the permanent home address of the pupil, to the school and not from the bus stop.

- (ii) Pupils that are eligible to travel on Education and Library Board buses are not issued with a bus pass. Only pupils entitled to assistance and travelling on Translink buses are issued with passes. The Education and Library Boards have confirmed that the total of all pupils eligible to travel on Board buses whether eligible under the criteria above or because of special educational needs is 25,024.

Free Bus Passes in the Crumlin and Glenavy Area

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 116/08, AQW 521/08, AQW 1242/08 and AQW 1470/08, (i) how many pupils were issued with free bus passes in the Crumlin and Glenavy area for the 2010/11 academic year; (ii) to list the schools these pupils are travelling to and the number attending each school; and (iii) the cost to her Department of issuing these free bus passes.

(AQW 820/11)

Minister of Education: Chuir Boird Oideachais agus Leabharlann an Oirthuaiscirt agus an Oirdheiscirt in iúl: (i) go n-eisíodh busphasanna saora chuig 1,382 dalta i limistéir Chromghlinn agus Lann Abhaigh don bhliain acadúil 2010/11; (ii) go bhfuil na scoileanna a dtaistealaíonn na daltaí chucu agus líon na ndaltaí a fhreastalaíonn ar gach scoil mar atá mionsonraithe sa tábla atá ceangailte; agus (iii) go raibh costas iomlán de £897,456.98 ar na busphasanna saora seo a eisiúint. Tá na figiúirí seo mar a bhí siad ar 4 Deireadh Fómhair 2010.

The North-Eastern and South-Eastern Education and Library Boards have advised that: (i) 1,382 pupils were issued with free bus passes in the Crumlin and Glenavy area for the 2010/11 academic year; (ii) the schools these pupils travel to and the number attending each school are as detailed in the attached table; and (iii) the total cost of issuing these free bus passes was £897,456.98.

These figures are as at 4 October 2010.

School	Number Attending
Antrim Grammar School	111
Aquinas Grammar School	29
Ballymacrocket Primary School	13
Belfast Boys Model School	1
Belfast Girls Model School	2
Belfast Royal Academy	16
Brownlow Integrated College	1
Crumlin Primary School	110
Carrick Primary School	1
Cambridge House Grammar School	11
Christian Brothers' Secondary School	4
Coláiste Feirste	2
Craigavon High School	2
Cranmore Integrated Primary School	1
Crumlin Integrated College	61
De La Salle High School	35
Dominican College, Fortwilliam	64
Dunmurry High School	1
Edmund Rice College	1
Fort Hill Integrated College	11
Friends' School, Lisburn	18
Hazelwood College	3
Hunterhouse College	15
Laurelhill Community College	9
Little Flower Girls' Secondary School	2
Lurgan College	1
Lurgan Junior High School	4
Malone Integrated College	11
Methodist College	9
Parkhall High School	29
Rathmore Grammar School	189
Slemish College	3
St Dominic's High School	120

School	Number Attending
St Aloysius Primary School	1
St Genevieve's High School	18
St Louise's Comprehensive College	82
St Mary's Christian Brothers' Grammar School	69
St Michael's Grammar School	1
St Patrick's Academy, Lisburn	135
St Rose's High School	3
St Joseph's Primary School	31
St Benedict's College, Randalstown	2
St Louis' Grammar School, Ballymena	1
St Malachy's College	97
St Mary's High School, Lurgan	1
St Patrick's College, Belfast	4
St Paul's Junior High School	4
The Royal Belfast Academical Institution	11
Victoria College	6
Wallace High School, Lisburn	26

Transport to Mainstream Schools

Mr M Durkan asked the Minister of Education how many children are currently transported to mainstream schools by (i) taxi; (ii) private hire buses; and (iii) buses owned by the Education and Library Board, in each Education and Library Board area; and to detail the total cost under each category for each of the past three years.

(AQW 868/11)

Minister of Education: Chuir na Boird Oideachais agus Leabharlann (BOLanna) in iúl dom gur mar atá mionsonraithe sna táblaí thíos atá líon na bpáistí a iompraítear ar scoileanna príomhshruitha (i) i dtacsaithe; (ii) i mbusanna fruilithe príobháideacha; agus (iii) i mbusanna ar leis an BOL, i ngach limistéar BOL, iad agus an costas iomlán atá orthu faoi gach catagóir. Níl figiúirí don bhliain 2009/10 ar fáil go fóill.

I have been advised by the Education and Library Boards (ELBs) that the number of children transported to mainstream schools by (i) taxi; (ii) private hire buses; and (iii) buses owned by the ELB, in each ELB area, and the total cost under each category are as detailed in the tables below. Figures for 2009/10 are not yet available.

(I) NUMBER OF CHILDREN TRANSPORTED TO MAINSTREAM SCHOOLS BY TAXI

	2006/07 Number of Children	2007/08 Number of Children	2008/09 Number of Children
Belfast	193	129	152
North-Eastern	347	319	415

	2006/07 Number of Children	2007/08 Number of Children	2008/09 Number of Children
South-Eastern	543	460	382
Southern	879	820	813
Western	513	518	533
Total Cost	N/A*1	N/A*1	£5,334,475

(II) NUMBER OF CHILDREN TRANSPORTED TO MAINSTREAM SCHOOLS BY PRIVATE HIRE BUSES

	2006/07 Number of Children	2007/08 Number of Children	2008/09 Number of Children
Belfast	38	53	57
North-Eastern	828	812	674
South-Eastern	132	114	102
Southern	3,956	3,646	3,500
Western	2,087	1,955	2,010
Total Cost	N/A*1	N/A*1	£4,478,621

(III) NUMBER OF CHILDREN TRANSPORTED TO MAINSTREAM SCHOOLS BY BUSES OWNED BY THE EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD

	2006/07 Number of Children	2007/08 Number of Children	2008/09 Number of Children
Belfast	141	154	130
North-Eastern	1,952	1,978	1,891
South-Eastern	1,957	1,976	1,939
Southern	8,983	9,045	8,434
Western	10,918	10,307	9,980
Total Cost	N/A*1	N/A*1	£17,273,509

*1 Information is not held in a format which makes it possible to separate pupils with statements who travel to mainstream schools from those with statements travelling to special schools.

Integrated Schooling

Ms A Lo asked the Minister of Education for her assessment of the statement by Oxford Economics that integrated schooling could help schools survive future funding cuts.

(AQW 888/11)

Minister of Education: Choimisiúnaigh an Ciste um Oideachas Comhtháite (COC) an staidreamh le Oxford Economics agus mionsonraíonn sé na buntáistí a bhaineann le ‘comhoideachas’ in ionad oideachas ‘comhtháite’. Níl oideachas comhtháite féin ach ina ghné amháin de Chomhoideachas. Is staidreamh scóipe í an tuairisc agus ní sholáthraíonn sí go leor sonra chun barúil dheifnídeach a fhorbairt ag an am seo.

The study by Oxford Economics was commissioned by the Integrated Education Fund (IEF) and reports upon the positives of ‘shared’ rather than ‘integrated’ education. Integrated education by itself is

only one aspect of Shared Education. The report is a scoping study and does not therefore provide sufficient detail to inform a definitive opinion at this time.

As a scoping study, the report has concluded that there are a number of factors which, when considered together, offer potential to make a case for shared education in light of the current economic climate (and recommends a more comprehensive study), but fails to take account of pertinent issues which would also need to be addressed such as parental choice, political impetus, community readiness and potential barriers. All of these issues are key factors in relation to shared education.

I am fully committed to encouraging schools from all sectors towards working together to ensure the best use of available resources at this difficult time.

Funding for Youth Work and Community Safety in North Belfast

Ms C Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the level of funding by her Department for (a) youth work; and (b) community safety in North Belfast, including groups based in the city centre, in each of the last three years; (ii) to where this funding has been allocated; (iii) the amount allocated in each case; and (iv) the duration of this funding.

(AQW 898/11)

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.

Telephone Contracts

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister of Education (i) to which company the (a) South Eastern Education and Library Board; and (b) Western Education and Library Board awarded their most recent telephone contract; (ii) when the contracts commenced; (iii) the cost of the contracts; (iv) the duration of the contracts; and (v) whether the contracts were put to tender.

(AQW 912/11)

Minister of Education: [(i) Bronnadh na conarthaí is déanaí teileafóin do Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlann an Oirdheiscirt agus do Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlann an Iarthair ar:

[(i) The most recent telephone contracts for the South Eastern Education and Library Board and the Western Education and Library Board were awarded to:

Education and Library Board (ELB)	Service Provider Awarded
South Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB)	Cable & Wireless BT Orange
Western Education and Library Board (WELB)	BT

(II) CONTRACTS COMMENCED:

Education and Library Board (ELB)	Service Provider	Date Contract Commenced
South Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB)	Cable & Wireless BT Orange	1st January 2007 1st March 2010 1st March 2010
Western Education and Library Board (WELB)	BT	1st September 2010

(III) COST OF CONTRACTS:

Education and Library Board (ELB)	Cost
South Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB)	<p>Cost of landline type telephony services – these costs are associated with ELB's HQ and the provision of support services to schools such as CASS, transport, school kitchens etc.</p> <p>2005-06 £209,904</p> <p>2006-07 £178,850</p> <p>2007-08 £136,943</p> <p>2008-09 £124,073</p> <p>2009-10 £95,164</p> <p>The cost of the maintenance provision for the HQ Meridian Telephony System is £22.3k over the last 4 years.</p>
Western Education and Library Board (WELB)	<p>The contract is not for a fixed amount, however the discounts available to WELB under the contract is based upon a nominal committed spend of £200k per annum.</p>

(IV) DURATION OF THE CONTACTS:

Education and Library Board (ELB)	Service Provider	Duration of Contract
South Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB)	<p>Cable & Wireless</p> <p>BT</p> <p>Orange</p>	<p>1 January 2007 – 31 December 2010</p> <p>1st March 2010 to 29 February 2012</p> <p>1st March 2010 to 29 February 2012</p>
Western Education and Library Board (WELB)	BT	This contract is for a two year period expiring on 31 August 2012

(V) WHETHER THE CONTRACTS WERE PUT TO TENDER:**SEELB**

The tender for the maintenance of Meridian Telephony Switch at SEELB HQ was administered by the SEELB's Procurement Section and subsequently awarded to Cable and Wireless. For the other two telecoms contracts, SEELB used the Office of Government Commerce (OGC) Pan Government Frameworks.

WELB

WELB secured the services of BT through the Office of Government Commerce (OGC) Pan Government Frameworks.

Youth Club for Autistic Children at Downshire High School

Mr D Hilditch asked the Minister of Education why the Youth Club for autistic children at Downshire High School ceased at the end of June 2010.

(AQW 960/11)

Minister of Education: Tá Bord Oideachais agus Leabharlann an Oirthuaiscirt (BOLOT) freagrach as soláthar seirbhísí don ógra i limistéar Charraig Fhearghais. Chuir Príomhfheidhmeannach an BOLOT

le fios nach raibh aon chlub ar leith ag oibriú in Downshire School le haghaidh páistí uathacha. Bhí tionscadal píolótach comhtháthaithe, a raibh baint ag daoine óga uathacha ó chlub scoile Downshire leis, ag oibriú le linn na bliana acadúla a chuaigh thart, áfach. Cuireadh an tionscadal píolótach seo i gcrích i mí an Mheithimh 2010.

The North Eastern Education and Library Board (NEELB) is responsible for youth service provision in the Carrickfergus area. The Chief Executive of the NEELB has advised that there has been no specific club for autistic children operating in Downshire School. There was, however, a pilot integration project running during the last academic year which involved autistic young people and young people from the Downshire school club. This pilot concluded in June 2010.

Following an evaluation of the pilot project, representatives from the NEELB Youth Service have met with Downshire School and agreed to start another phase of the pilot project in mid October 2010.

Preschool Places

Mr P Givan asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of children who were unsuccessful in their applications for pre-school places for the 2010/11 academic year, broken down by constituency. **(AQW 987/11)**

Minister of Education: Is é is aidhm don chlár um fhorleathnú oideachais réamhscoile ná áit shaor a sholáthar do gach páiste sa bhliain go díreach roimh an scoil. Mar sin de, ba cheart an t-eolas a bhaineann leis na páistí sin a sholáthar.

The pre-school education expansion programme aims to provide a free place for all children in their immediate pre-school year. Therefore, it is most appropriate to provide the information in relation to those children.

The Education and Library Boards have advised that they do not retain the information sought by constituency. However, they have provided, below, the number of children in their immediate pre-school year who were unsuccessful, at the end of the admissions processes which concluded on 30 April 2010, in their applications for pre-school places for the 2010/11 academic year, broken down by council.

Council	Unplaced
Antrim	29
Ards	38
Armagh	33
Ballymena	11
Ballymoney	32
Banbridge	37
Belfast	213
Carrickfergus	13
Castlereagh	73
Coleraine	24
Cookstown	9
Craigavon	108
Derry	90
Down	42
Dungannon and South Tyrone	39

Council	Unplaced
Fermanagh	13
Larne	4
Limavady	15
Lisburn	104
Magherafelt	3
Moyle	6
Newry and Mourne	73
Newtownabbey	62
North Down	51
Omagh	29
Strabane	11
Outside north of Ireland	6

In order to ensure, as far as possible, that the needs of these children were met, I allocated up to £1.3 million to cover the cost of providing an extra 1200 pre-school places in the voluntary/private sector. Many children who were unplaced at the conclusion of the admissions process will have secured a pre-school place before the start of the school year in September.

School Enrolments in Lagan Valley

Mr P Givan asked the Minister of Education to detail for each of the last three years (i) the number of pupils enrolled in each (a) primary school; and (b) secondary school in the Lagan Valley constituency; and (ii) the capacity of each school.

(AQW 988/11)

Minister of Education: I ngach bliain de na trí bliana a chuaigh thart, tá (i) líon na ndaltaí atá rollaithe i ngach (a) bunscoil; agus (b) i ngach iarbhunscoil i dtoghcheantar Ghleann an Lagáin; agus (ii) acmhainn gach scoile, mar atá mionsonraithe sna táblaí faoi iamh.

In each of the last three years (i) the number of pupils enrolled in each (a) primary school; and (b) secondary school in the Lagan Valley constituency; and (ii) the capacity (ie approved enrolment) of each school is as detailed in the tables attached.

(a) Primary School	2007/08		2008/09		2009/10	
	(i) Actual Enrolment	(ii) Approved Enrolment	(i) Actual Enrolment	(ii) Approved Enrolment	(i) Actual Enrolment	(ii) Approved Enrolment
Anahilt Primary School	185	300	173	300	154	300
Ballinderry Primary School	171	200	170	200	160	200
Ballymacash Primary School	308	334	308	334	304	334
¹ Brownlee Primary School	153	179	182	179	175	185

(a) Primary School	2007/08		2008/09		2009/10	
	(i) Actual Enrolment	(ii) Approved Enrolment	(i) Actual Enrolment	(ii) Approved Enrolment	(i) Actual Enrolment	(ii) Approved Enrolment
Carr Primary School	63	100	46	100	38	100
Derriaghy Primary School	39	125	47	125	38	125
Downshire Primary School, Hillsborough	476	500	492	515	499	535
Dromara Primary School	158	160	174	180	173	185
Dromore Central Primary School	645	668	658	668	665	673
Dunmurry Primary School	125	262	133	262	131	262
Fair Hill Primary School	208	210	211	232	225	232
Fort Hill Integrated Primary School	205	240	201	240	201	240
² Friend's Preparatory School	143	-	164	-	150	-
¹ Harmony Hill Primary School	554	588	600	588	577	588
³ Hilden Integrated Primary School	36	126	.	126	.	-
Killowen Primary School	314	420	326	420	342	420
Knockmore Primary School	104	212	94	212	94	212
Largymore Primary School	137	412	128	412	112	232
Lisburn Central Primary School	175	335	167	254	151	254
Maghaberry Primary School	210	227	198	227	191	227
Meadow Bridge Primary School	239	290	229	290	238	290
Moir Primary School	355	390	355	390	353	390

(a) Primary School	2007/08		2008/09		2009/10	
	(i) Actual Enrolment	(ii) Approved Enrolment	(i) Actual Enrolment	(ii) Approved Enrolment	(i) Actual Enrolment	(ii) Approved Enrolment
Oakwood Integrated Primary School	199	203	195	203	196	203
Old Warren Primary School	90	305	92	305	80	305
Pond Park Primary School	545	598	538	598	553	598
Riverdale Primary School	185	203	191	203	185	203
Rowandale Integrated Primary School	18	29	33	29	61	67
Seymour Hill Primary School	148	256	136	256	139	256
St Aloysius Primary School	255	490	255	490	272	490
St Colman's Primary School	271	436	277	436	287	436
St Colman's Primary School	88	145	83	145	85	145
⁴ St Colman's Primary School Moira	17	87	2	87	.	-
St Joseph's Primary School	277	395	309	395	333	395
St Michael's Primary School (Finnis)	65	106	66	106	69	106
Tonagh Primary School	136	228	124	228	152	228
² Wallace High Preparatory School	142	-	125	-	106	-

Source: School Census / School Access Team

- 1 where the actual number enrolled exceeds the approved enrolment number the school has been granted a temporary variation.
- 2 DE does not set enrolment numbers for preparatory schools
- 3 School closed 30 November 2008
- 4 School closed 30 June 2009

(b) Post-Primary School	2007/08		2008/09		2009/10	
	(i) Actual Enrolment	(ii) Approved Enrolment	(i) Actual Enrolment	(ii) Approved Enrolment	(i) Actual Enrolment	(ii) Approved Enrolment
Dromore High School	741	750	746	750	741	750
Dunmurry High School	299	400	304	400	279	400
Fort Hill College	835	850	847	850	839	850
¹ Friends' School	967	970	982	970	968	970
Laurelhill Community College	908	948	882	948	855	948
Lisnagarvey High School	259	500	297	500	355	500
St Patrick's High School	279	530	308	530	341	530
Wallace High School	1,156	1160	1,166	1160	1,160	1160

Source: School Census / School Access Team

- Where the actual number enrolled exceeds the approved enrolment number the school has been granted a temporary variation.

Neighbourhood Renewal

Ms J McCann asked the Minister of Education to detail the services currently funded, fully or partly, by her Department under Neighbourhood Renewal in the West Belfast constituency.

(AQW 997/11)

Minister of Education: Tá Athnuachan Chomharsanachta de fhreagracht ar an Roinn Forbartha Sóisialta agus soláthraítear é trí Oifigí Forbartha Réigiúnaí.

Neighbourhood Renewal is the responsibility of the Department for Social Development delivered through the Regional Development Offices.

Education related projects, which are supported by the Department for Social Development (DSD) under the Neighbourhood Renewal programme are managed by the Department of Education (DE) through a technical transfer, with operational responsibility being undertaken through Education & Library Boards. However, these arrangements have not been adopted by DSD's Belfast Regional Office. Currently, the Belfast Regional Office identifies, approves and manages Neighbourhood Renewal projects directly without any input from DE.

You may wish to seek further information directly from the Department for Social Development.

Bunscoil Bheann Mhadagáin in North Belfast

Ms C Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Education what plans she has to progress Bunscoil Bheann Mhadagáin in North Belfast on to the list for new build schools.

(AQW 1035/11)

Minister of Education: Féadaim a dhearbhu duit gur mhaith liom infheistiú i scoileanna i dTuaisceart Bhéal Feirste agus i gceantair eile ina bhfuil ardleibhéil díothachta sóisialta, ach de dheasca na srianta reatha atá ar mo bhuiséad caipitil agus mar gheall ar an neamhchinnteacht a bhaineann leis an leibhéal sócmhainní atá ar fáil le haghaidh forbartha sa todhchaí, ní féidir tiomantas a thabhairt maidir leis an bhealach chun tosaigh do thionscadail ionchasacha, amhail an tionscadal le haghaidh Bhunscoil Bheann Mhadagáin.

I can assure you that I want to invest in schools in North Belfast and other areas with high levels of social deprivation, but due to current constraints on my capital budget and the uncertainty over the level of resources available for future development, it is not possible to provide a commitment regarding the way forward for potential projects, such as that for Bunscoil Bheann Mhadagáin.

There has been historic failure to invest sufficiently in our schools' estate and I will continue to ask my Executive colleagues for their support in securing additional funds in order to address this underinvestment.

Funding of Childcare Provision

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) her Department's criteria for any funding of childcare provision; and (ii) how much her Department has invested in childcare provision in each of the last three years, including Sure Start programmes.

(AQW 1083/11)

Minister of Education:

- (i) Ní mhaoiníonn an RO cúram leanaí go díreach. Tairgeann an Roinn réimse soláthair i luathbhlianta, chun oideachas agus forbairt na bpáistí atá idir 0-4 bliain d'aois, roimh an aois éigeantach scoile, a chur chun cinn. Cé gurb eol dúinn go gcuireann tuismitheoirí soláthar réamhscoile san áireamh agus iad ag déanamh socruithe um chúram leanaí, níl an soláthar seo ceaptha go príomha le haghaidh bearta cúram leanaí.
- (i) DE does not fund childcare directly. The Department offers a range of early years provision, to promote the education and development of children aged 0-4 before compulsory school age. While we are aware that parents take account of pre-school provision when they are making childcare arrangements, this provision is not intended primarily as a childcare measure.
- (ii) Sure Start works with parents and children, from birth to age 4, to promote the physical, intellectual, social and emotional development of pre-school children.

Funding for the Sure Start Programme for the past 3 years is listed in the tables below. In addition, the Early Years Development Fund provides for the core operating costs of the 4 Childcare Partnerships in the Health and Social Care Board, which play a key role in the management and development of Sure Start. A pilot capital programme (to invest in the physical infrastructure of early years services) also made funding available to Sure Start:

Sure Start Funding	No. of projects	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
Total	34 Projects	14,789,676	17,194,973	18,810,362

Early Years Development Fund	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
Total	1,335,455	1,368,322	1,553,987

Sure Start (Pilot Capital Funding)	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
Total	0	233	555,028

Rationalisation of the School System

Mr T Lunn asked the Minister of Education for her assessment of whether the rationalisation of the school system can only be achieved within the context of an approach based on inter-school and cross-sectoral co-operation.

(AQW 1092/11)

Minister of Education: Tá sé de dhualgas ar an údarás ábhartha oideachais, sa chéad ásc, inmharthanacht a scoileanna sa todhchaí a mheas. Ní mór do na húdaráis scoile pleananna ar chuíchóiriú eastát na scoileanna a spíonadh i gcomhthéacs Pholasaí na Roinne ar Scoileanna Inbhuanaithe, rud a aithníonn an tábhacht a bhaineann le comhoibriú idir scoileanna. Is lárnach de m'aisling le haghaidh oideachais atá scoileanna inbhuanaithe láidre a sholáthraíonn oideachas den scoth agus rochtain ar an churaclam iomlán.

It is a matter for the relevant education authority, in the first instance, to consider the future viability of their schools. Plans for rationalisation of the schools' estate must be considered by the school authorities in the context of the Department's Sustainable Schools Policy which recognises the importance of collaboration between schools. Strong, sustainable schools providing quality education and access to the full curriculum are central to my vision for education.

The Education and Skills Authority, when established, will have overall responsibility for bringing forward area plans within the policy framework set by DE. This will involve area planning groups, which will include representatives of sectoral support bodies, exploring opportunities for sharing and collaboration within and across sectors to ensure that we make best use of resources to provide a high quality education.

Department for Employment and Learning

Surplus Land

Dr A McDonnell asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail any (i) land; and (ii) property owned by his Department which is currently deemed surplus to requirements, including the location of the land or property and any plans for its disposal.

(AQW 828/11)

Minister for Employment and Learning (Sir Reg Empey): The only land or property owned by DEL is Felden House, Newtownabbey, which is being used by the Northern Regional College until new accommodation has been constructed at its main campus. The new premises are complete, and the college will be vacating Felden on 31 December 2010, at which time it will become surplus. The Northern Ireland Housing Executive expressed a social housing interest in the site some time ago. A Public Sector Trawl will issue shortly to all NICS Departments, giving them an opportunity to declare an interest in the property. If no interest is declared, DEL will work with Land and Property Services to determine the best strategy for disposal on the open market.

Stuart Report

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning why the Stuart Report has not yet been published; and when he expects it to be published.

(AQW 842/11)

Minister for Employment and Learning: The report of the independent review of tuition fees and student finance arrangements in Northern Ireland, which was submitted to me earlier this year by Joanne Stuart, the Review Chairperson, was published on 12 October. This was to coincide with publication of the findings of the Browne review of higher education and student support in England and to ensure all interested parties have the opportunity to consider both reviews together. The Stuart report recognised that the findings of the Browne review would need to be taken into account when assessing the position in Northern Ireland and indeed Joanne has agreed to update her report in light of Browne and the new context in which the higher education debate is now taking place. I intend

launching a public consultation in early 2011, on these issues, the timing of which allows me to also consider the findings of the Browne review.

Holylands Action Plan

Ms A Lo asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on the Holylands Action Plan and what preparations are being made in advance of the Halloween festivities.

(AQW 866/11)

Minister for Employment and Learning: You may be aware that Belfast City Council's Holyland InterAgency Group has taken on a more strategic role in progressing the actions outlined in the Action Plan developed by my Department, which has been incorporated into the InterAgency Group's Holyland Implementation Plan.

The Group has been working closely with key stakeholders, including government departments and agencies, in progressing a number of the key actions. Some of the agreed actions have already been addressed and others will be progressed in the coming months.

Progressed actions include:

- The introduction of CCTV into the Holyland area;
- An increase in the number of Community Safety Wardens;
- An increased police presence at key times of year;
- Deployment of student liaison officers at key times of the year;
- The launch of the 'Respect' campaign; and
- Enforcement of alcohol bye-laws.

A Halloween planning group, including the Belfast City Council, Queen's University, University of Ulster and the PSNI, met on 6 October at Queen's University to discuss preparations for the Halloween period. It is intended that similar plans will be adopted to those developed for Freshers' Week and last St. Patrick's Day.

You will wish to note that I intend to host a further Holyland Stakeholder Forum on 27 October 2010, and will, once again, be inviting key stakeholders along to the event to provide an update on progress.

Equality Commission Report

Ms A Lo asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of the Equality Commission report which states that the recession is having a particular impact on young men, with 20.4 per cent of 18-24 year old men unemployed; and what steps he is taking to address this.

(AQW 889/11)

Minister for Employment and Learning: I am aware of the Equality Commission's Report which confirms what I have known for some time that young men have been particularly hard hit by the recent recession. We have in place measures to address the issue. 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 people, including young men, find work.

Steps to Work (StW) 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.

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 young people find and keep suitable employment, this provision includes: the Job Introduction Scheme, Access to Work (NI) and Workable (NI).

The Local Employment Intermediary Service (LEMIS) is available in Belfast, Londonderry and Strabane and complements, but is independent of, the statutory employment services. The service is available to, amongst others, those who are returning to the labour market and those who are not claiming benefits.

In addition, specific measures have been taken to address the impact of the current economic downturn, some of which are targeted at young people. These include -

- Those who have lost their jobs, including those from within the construction industry which has been particularly badly hit by the recession, may immediately avail of any Step One provision, such as up-dating their Curriculum Vitae or improving interview / jobsearch skills.
- Participants who have been out of the labour market for 13 weeks or more may avail of Step 2 provision, such as undertaking a new qualification provision or retrain in a new occupational area. The participant may enter at an earlier stage, at the Adviser's discretion, for example if there is a positive prospect of a job outcome.
- Construction Apprentices, who have lost their jobs due to the downturn, can complete the NVQ element of an Apprenticeship Framework with Steps providers.
- From 6 April 2009, the upper limit for short-term training costs under Steps provision has been raised to £2000 from the previous level of £300. This allows access to be provided to a range of appropriate short training courses which will address the needs of a changing client base.
- Introducing a Waged Stand within the Steps to Work programme aimed at a specific, identified target group (JSA, Income Support, Incapacity Benefit/ Employment and Support Allowance) who have not worked for 30 months or more and will provide up to 26 weeks employment with voluntary/community sector organisations.
- Piloting a temporary employment programme for long-term unemployed young people (18 to 24 year olds).
- Piloting an Internship Scheme for unemployed graduates.

You will appreciate that my ability to introduce additional measures will be influenced by the resources made available through the 2010 Budget process.

Education Centre at the Northside Village Centre in Derry

Mr R McCartney asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on the future of the North West Regional College's education centre at the Northside Village Centre in Derry.

(AQW 959/11)

Minister for Employment and Learning: The North West Regional College has advised that it rents 1100 square metres of classroom accommodation in a retail commercial centre in Shantallow. It provides a range of classroom and computer laboratories offering outreach provision. The lease on the premises expired in September 2010 and has been extended for one year. The retention of the facility is reviewed annually based on enrolments. No decision has been made by the college to close the facility.

Neighbourhood Renewal

Ms J McCann asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the services currently funded, fully or partly, by his Department under Neighbourhood Renewal in the West Belfast constituency.

(AQW 1001/11)

Minister for Employment and Learning: The Department for Employment and Learning does not fund any services, either fully or partly, under Neighbourhood Renewal in the West Belfast constituency. It does, however, deliver a range of programmes related to employment and skills which aim to address

disadvantage and are targeted at the needs of individuals, many of whom live in Neighbourhood Renewal areas.

Full-time Distance Learning Students

Mr S Moutray asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, pursuant to AQW 558/11, how many full-time distance learning students in higher education have (i) applied for; and (ii) been awarded (a) a fee grant; and (b) a course grant, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 1005/11)

Minister for Employment and Learning: The table below details the number of Northern Ireland domiciled students undertaking a full-time distance learning higher education course who have (i) applied for; and (ii) been awarded (a) a fee grant; and (b) a course grant, in each of the last five academic years.

Academic Year	(i) No of Applications	(ii)(a) No of awards for Fee Grant	(ii)(b) No of awards for Course Grant
2006/07	45	37	44
2007/08	48	41	45
2008/09	48	43	46
2009/10	24	22	23
2010/11*	8	4	4

* Figures as at 6 October 2010

Education Maintenance Allowance

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning (i) why the Education Maintenance Allowance is removed from students who turn 19 years of age during an academic year; and (ii) why entitlement is not determined by the age of a student when enrolling on a course.

(AQW 1014/11)

Minister for Employment and Learning:

- (i) I can advise that Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) would only be removed from an eligible EMA student during an academic year if they reach their maximum entitlement to EMA. All eligible students are entitled to receive a maximum of 117 weeks of EMA payments based on attendance and the course lasting for 39 weeks each academic year for 3 years.
- (ii) EMA entitlement is determined by the age of a student when enrolling on a course. In order to receive an EMA for the 2010/11 academic year, eligible students must have attained their 16th, 17th, 18th or 19th birthdays between 2 July 2009 and 1 July 2010.

The age criterion of the Northern Ireland EMA scheme is in line with current Department of Education legislation (Article 46 of the Education and Libraries (NI) Order 1986, as substituted by Article 156 of the Education Reform (NI) Order 1989) which states that pupils who reach the age of 16 between 2 July and 31 August in any one year are not deemed to have attained the upper limit of compulsory school age until 30 June of the following year.

Translation of Departmental Papers

Mr A Bresland asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how much his Department spent on the translation of departmental papers into (i) Irish; and (ii) Ulster-Scots in (a) 2007/08; (b) 2008/09; and (c) 2009/10.

(AQW 1128/11)

Minister for Employment and Learning: The Department for Employment and Learning's spend on the translation of departmental papers into Irish and Ulster Scots for the years 2007/08, 2008/09 and 2009/10 is as follows.

	Irish	Ulster Scots
2007/08	£494.10	£69.95
2008/09	£6,270.00	£370.69
2009/10	£4,793.85	nil

Redundancies at Regional Colleges

Mr T Burns asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many redundancies are planned at each regional college.

(AQO 258/11)

Minister for Employment and Learning: Colleges must operate within their allocated budgets. Given the Sector's major contribution to workforce and economic development, I will do all in my power to minimise the impact of CSR on frontline Further Education services, subject to the constraints presented but the Colleges will need to plan actively for a number of scenarios arising from the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR), including the possibility of reduced funding. As staff salaries form a significant element of colleges' expenditure, this may involve redundancies.

Southern Regional College Campuses

Mr C Boylan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on any proposal to merge the campuses of the Southern Regional College onto one site.

(AQO 259/11)

Minister for Employment and Learning: A Strategic Outline Case, presented to my Department by the Southern Regional College, includes proposals to replace the existing outdated accommodation at Armagh, Banbridge, Lurgan and Portadown. The Outline Case has considered the possibility of rationalisation of campuses, but no decisions will be made until a more comprehensive business case examines all of the value for money options.

Survey of Core Gateway

Mr P Frew asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, in relation to the recent survey of Core Gateway undertaken across six Jobs and Benefits office areas, how many of the 85 per cent of participants interviewed were graduates.

(AQO 260/11)

Minister for Employment and Learning: The survey did not segment customers so it is not known how many were graduates. The survey was carried out to establish customer views on the efficacy of Core Gateway as part of the Employment Service Improvement Project. Findings from the survey were that 85% of clients who attend Core Gateway find it beneficial.

Apprenticeships

Mr A Maskey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether he has had any recent discussions with his Ministerial colleagues about securing apprenticeship places within their Departments.

(AQO 263/11)

Minister for Employment and Learning: On 4th August 2009, I wrote to Ministerial colleagues advising them of the Department's Programme-Led Apprenticeship programme, seeking their support in the provision of placements within the public sector.

Following this, at a debate in the Assembly on 8th June 2010, I was called upon to further explore the roll out of placements within the public sector.

My officials have recently written to Training Suppliers encouraging them to contact local public bodies, such as District Councils and HSS Trusts, with the aim of widening the occupational areas on offer.

Proposed Merger of Stranmillis College and Queen's University

Mr S Anderson asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of the responses to the public consultation on the Equality Impact Assessment undertaken by Stranmillis College in relation to the proposed merger with Queen's University.

(AQO 264/11)

Minister for Employment and Learning: As members will know, the College launched its public consultation in June and the closure date was Friday 1 October. The consultation document was sent to 109 consultee organisations, it was widely publicised in the press and was made publicly available on the College's website. The College is currently preparing a summary of the consultation submissions it has received and will share with my Department when it is complete.

Training for Success and Apprenticeship NI programmes

Mr G Campbell asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many school leavers in the Coleraine Borough Council area enrolled on Training for Success and Apprenticeship NI programmes over the last five years and how many obtained an NVQ or accredited vocational qualification.

(AQO 265/11)

Minister for Employment and Learning: Since Training for Success was introduced in September 2007, 587 individuals from the Coleraine Borough Council area have participated or are participating on both this programme and ApprenticeshipsNI.

It is important to note that Training for Success is a non-NVQ programme. In addition, since an apprenticeship can take between two to four years to complete, consequently it is too early to report on qualification outcomes for a significant number of these apprentices.

However to date 62 have achieved a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) outcome, 15 have achieved a Vocationally Relevant Qualification (VRQ) and 47 have achieved a Technical Certificate.

Essential Skills Courses

Mr J McCallister asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of the uptake of Essential Skills courses by school leavers.

(AQO 266/11)

Minister for Employment and Learning: Sixty percent (60%) of the 168,177 Essential Skills enrolments² have been within the 16-19 ageband. In the most recent academic year 2009/10, 64% of the 41,005 Essential Skills enrolments in that year are in respect of those aged 16-19. These figures demonstrate the persistence of unacceptably high levels of educational underachievement in Northern Ireland and the pressing economic and social case for addressing this issue.

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Broadband, North Down

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on the delivery of next generation broadband for the North Down constituency.

(AQW 704/11)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mrs A Foster): In North Down next generation broadband is delivered by wire line operators and cable TV companies. I understand that investments are being made by these companies on an ongoing and business as usual basis.

Specifically under the contract DETI has with BT, broadband upgrades are planned for 32 designated areas in the North Down constituency. By the end of August 2010, 23 areas had been upgraded which is 72% of the total for the constituency. Across all of Northern Ireland 40% of all designated areas have been upgraded. By May 2011 all designated areas are expected to be upgraded.

Broadband Speed in North Antrim

Mr D O'Loan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the average broadband speed in rural areas of North Antrim compared with urban areas such as Belfast; and what advances can be expected in order to improve the speeds of each communication services to rural consumers in North Antrim.

(AQW 849/11)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Broadband speeds depend on a wide range of factors but speeds comparable to those available in Belfast are widely available across rural areas of North Antrim. DETI has provided funding for projects bringing direct international connectivity to the area, as well as next generation broadband services, wireless broadband services and remote broadband services.

Regarding advances consumers can expect, under the Next Generation Broadband Project, broadband upgrades are planned for 39 designated areas in the North Antrim constituency. By the end of August 2010, 12 areas had been upgraded and by May 2011 all designated areas are expected to be upgraded. Whilst this project is primarily directed at businesses, there will be spill-over benefits for other consumers.

Promotion of Hurling

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what the Northern Ireland Tourist Board has done to promote hurling as one of the tourist attractions in North Antrim.

(AQW 852/11)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) has been supporting the development of the Economusee concept in Northern Ireland. The Economusee concept is based around the idea of safeguarding and developing local craft skills and at the same time, creating a new tourism product by developing a series of craft workshops with open access to the public.

Scullion Hurls based in Loughgiel, Co Antrim has just been approved for development as the second business in Northern Ireland to meet the criteria to be an Economusee.

Scullion Hurls is a traditional craft with strong roots in the local area of North Antrim, manufacturing ash hurleys for individuals and clubs across Ireland and further afield. The current business employs two brothers who promote their product within their retail unit and on-line.

NITB promotes major national and international sporting events through its website www.discovernorthernireland.com and literature, but is not designed to promote specific individual sports. Responsibility for promoting Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) events rests with the GAA however NITB does make specific reference to Casement Park as a venue for hurling.

The sporting traditions of Northern Ireland are represented prominently in Tourism Ireland's global marketing communications suite of 41 websites in 22 markets, market literature and in promotional and publicity campaigns. It is recognised that their portrayal can play an increasingly important role in helping potential visitors to envisage some of the unique and compelling aspects of a holiday in Northern Ireland.

2012 Olympic Bids

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many local firms have been successful in bids for contracts relating to the 2012 Olympics.

(AQO 268/11)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Invest NI is aware of 20 companies and organisations who have been successful in winning contracts relating to the London 2012 Games. However, there are likely to be other companies who have also won business but have signed the “No marketing rights protocol for suppliers, consultants and contractors” drawn up by the Olympic Development Authority and London Organising Committee of the Olympic Games. This contract means that local companies cannot publicise their success unless they gain prior approval from the Olympic authorities.

Legal Services

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how much her Department and its agencies paid for legal services in each of the last five years, including details of the firms engaged.

(AQW 1116/11)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment avails of legal services from a number of firms/organisations. The Department paid the following for legal services in each of the last five financial years:

2005/06* £85,057

- | | |
|---|-------------------------------|
| ■ Crown Solicitors | ■ McCartan Turkington & Breen |
| ■ Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) | ■ Millar McCall Wylie |
| ■ ** | |

2006/07* £116,493

- | | |
|-----------------------------|-----------------|
| ■ Crown Solicitors | ■ Blair & Hanna |
| ■ Fitzsimons, Kinney Mallon | ■ DFP |

2007/08* £174,192

- | | |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|
| ■ Crown Solicitors | ■ Simmons & Simmons |
| ■ Martin Wolfe | ■ DMD Consultants |
| ■ DFP | ■ Hewitt & Gilpin |
| ■ 2008/09 £458,662 | ■ Arthur Boyd & Company |
| ■ Crown Solicitors | ■ Liz McKeown |
| ■ DFP | ■ Martin Wolfe |
| ■ Land & Property Service | ■ Grant Thornton |
| ■ Denton Wilde Sapte | ■ Harbinson Mulholland |
| ■ King & Gowdy | ■ Moore Stephens |
| ■ McCambridge Duffy | |

2009/10 £852,068

- | | |
|----------------------------|------------------------------|
| ■ Crown Solicitors | ■ Fitzsimons Kinney & Mallon |
| ■ DFP | ■ Hewitt & Gilpin Solicitors |
| ■ Land & Property Services | ■ Keenan Solicitors |
| ■ Denton Wilde Sapte | ■ Moore Stephens |
| ■ CMG Solicitors | ■ McClure Watters |

- Liz McKeown
- Arthur Cox NI
- Arthur Boyd & Company
- John Owens
- Martin Wolfe
- Companies House
- Lynchehaun Associates Ltd

Notes:

- * The figures for the years 2005/06, 2006/07 and 2007/08 reflect DETI's legal costs associated with its Companies Registry and Departmental Personnel functions. These were the only legal costs that were separately identifiable in the previous accounting system. There may be other legal costs associated with the operation of departmental programmes which are not readily accessible for these financial years.
- ** Legal costs include payments made to the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP). In these cases, DFP acts as an agent in making payments to other providers of legal services.

Department of the Environment

Plastic Bags

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of the Environment if he has any plans to reduce the amount of plastic bags polluting landfill sites.

(AQW 815/11)

Minister of the Environment (Mr E Poots): I am keen to encourage everyone to acquire re-usable shopping bags and to get into the habit of using them when shopping. Our plastic bags 'consumption' is decreasing and I will therefore continue to encourage everyone to keep up their efforts in that direction. In my opinion, encouraging behaviour change is the best means of reducing the number of plastic bags that go to landfill sites, and reducing waste generally. It is my intention to tackle waste prevention behavioural change through the Rethink Waste campaign and to continue to work with supermarkets, through the Waste Resources Action Programme, to monitor and reduce plastic bag consumption. Plastic bags must, however, be seen as one important issue amongst a much broader range of challenges relating to waste prevention, since plastic bags represent less than one percent of the total waste that goes to landfill.

Surplus Land

Dr A McDonnell asked the Minister of the Environment to detail any (i) land; and (ii) property owned by his Department which is currently deemed surplus to requirements, including the location of the land or property and any plans for its disposal.

(AQW 827/11)

Minister of the Environment: The information you have requested is provided in the table below.

Location	Type	Area (Ha)	Disposal Plans
Upper Dunmurry Lane and Creighton Road, Dunmurry	Land: Undeveloped former golf course in two plots divided by road.	9.0	Transfer to DSD for disposal to a housing association for social housing (dependent on re-zoning for housing under BMAP). 0.03ha being sold to local resident to rationalise irregular boundary.
Crawfordsburn Country Park, Helen's Bay	Land: Two small boundary plots	0.14	To be sold to local residents to rationalise irregular boundary.

Planning Applications for Waste Disposal in Coleraine

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of live planning applications for waste disposal in the Ringsend and Mascoquin areas of Coleraine currently with the Planning Service; and whether any of these applications have the support of the North-West Waste Management Group. (AQW 862/11)

Minister of the Environment: There are three live planning applications for waste disposal in the Ringside and Macosquin areas of Coleraine. The sites are located at Cam Road, Belraugh Road and Craigmore Road.

B Mullan and Sons Ltd. submitted a full planning application, accompanied by an environmental statement, on 19 March 2009 for a site at Cam Road. The application seeks permission for the development of a non-hazardous landfill.

During the processing of the planning application for non-hazardous waste at Cam Road, the Northern West Waste Management Group was consulted by Planning Service on the 7 December 2009. The consultation reply was received by Planning Service on the 4 January 2010.

Waste management planning is a function of local government. In the consultation response from the Northern West Waste Management Group, they identified the need to make provision for its further landfill requirements and accordingly initiated a procurement process within which material considerations included, inter alia, the Public Procurement Regulations and the North West Regional Waste Management Plan. The procurement process resulted in B Mullan & Sons, promoters of the proposed Cam Road Landfill site, being appointed preferred bidder subject to their proposed site receiving planning permission and other statutory consents necessary to operate. Northern West Waste Management Group have identified that the proposed site at Cam Road is needed and will form part of the sub-regional Best Practicable Environmental Option (BPEO) if brought into operation.

T O'Connell and Sons submitted a full planning application on 5 August 2010 for a site at Belraugh Road. The application seeks permission for the importation and placing of inert waste generated from public sector infrastructure projects to improve poorly drained forestry plantation land and the provision of temporary infrastructure. The determination of the planning application for the site at Belraugh Road is ongoing. The Northern West Waste Management Group has not been consulted during the processing of this planning application.

Coleraine Skip Hire & Recycling Ltd submitted a planning application on 23 November 2009 to vary a planning condition of planning permission C/2005/1380/F to allow additional non-hazardous waste types to be deposited at Craigmore Landfill, Craigmore Road. The determination of the planning application for a site at Craigmore Road is ongoing. The Northern West Waste Management Group has not been consulted during the processing of this planning application to vary a planning condition.

The site at Cam Road has the support of the Northern West Waste Management Group. The current planning applications will be determined taking into account the relevant plan and policy provisions and all other material considerations.

Dikergammarus Villosus

Ms A Lo asked the Minister of the Environment what steps his Department is taking to prevent the shrimp *Dikergammarus Villosus* from entering our waterways. (AQW 879/11)

Minister of the Environment: It is widely recognised that invasive alien species are the second biggest threat to biodiversity loss worldwide.

In response to such threats officials in the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) work closely with the GB Non-native Species Programme Board. Following on from the discovery of the 'Killer Shrimp' (*Dikergammarus villosus*), at Grafham Water in England, my officials were notified and will continue to be kept informed of any developments by their counterparts in GB.

This East-West liaison is matched with North-South communication on invasive species with regular contact taking place with officials in the National Parks and Wildlife Service, Dublin, through a contract known as the 'Invasive Species in Ireland Project'.

Key aspects of this project have included the development of Codes of Good Practice for sectors considered to be at a high risk of introducing, or further spreading, invasive alien species. As such Codes of Good Practice have been developed for recreational water users and marina managers. My officials in NIEA have also provided training to several organisations and fishing clubs on invasive alien species identification and control.

In response to this notification my officials in NIEA issued a species alert and identification sheet around several Government Departments and other organisations. A species alert and ID sheet was also placed on the Invasive Species in Ireland website. In addition a press release was issued by my Department on 29 September 2010 warning of the threat of the 'Killer Shrimp'. This press release outlined the need for water users to clean their boats and equipment before moving to another water body.

Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Bill

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of the Environment what discussions his Department has had with dog organisations in relation to the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Bill; and if he can offer any assurances on the issues raised.

(AQW 895/11)

Minister of the Environment: On 14 September 2010, I met with representatives of the Kennel Club, who were seeking some clarification concerning the new system of dog control orders proposed under the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Bill. During the meeting the Kennel Club was reassured that the Department was proposing to introduce a system of dog control orders corresponding to that currently in operation in England and Wales. The Kennel Club was also reassured that the Department would be consulting with it and other key interests on future draft subordinate legislation on dog control orders and associated detailed guidance.

Northern Ireland Environment Agency

Mr A Bresland asked the Minister of the Environment how many inspections have been carried out by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency on farms in each constituency in each of the last three years.

(AQW 905/11)

Minister of the Environment: The locations of farms inspected are recorded against the postcode of the registered address of the farm by Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA). This is not necessarily the location of the land to which the inspection applies. They are not recorded on a Local Council, Northern Ireland Assembly or Westminster constituency basis. Therefore this information cannot be broken down by constituency.

There are two methods of selection for inspection visits. 25% are randomly selected from a list of all Single Farm Payment claimants. The remaining 75% are selected through a risk-based approach based on a number of parameters and on previous compliance records.

The table below gives a break down of NIEA scheduled Cross Compliance inspections by county, from recorded farm postcode, which may be helpful:-

Year	Antrim	Armagh	Derry/ Londonderry	Down	Fermanagh	Tyrone	Total inspections
2007	76	92	26	124	7	76	401
2008	50	14	71	89	12	142	378
2009	119	30	55	72	14	79	369
Total	245	136	152	285	33	297	1148

Northern Ireland Environment Agency: Glenavy

Mr M McLaughlin asked the Minister of the Environment (i) if he can confirm whether (a) the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) has received in excess of 200 complaints, annually, in relation to nuisance odours, since records began; and (b) residents in proximity to the proposed incinerator in Glenavy provided a dossier to the Minister, the CEO of the Planning Service and the CEO of Invest NI in relation to the NIEA records of pollution at this site; (ii) for his assessment of whether Ulster Farm By Products a subsidiary of Rose Energy's partner Glenfarm, has an unacceptable environmental track record in relation to water pollution and nuisance odours; and (iii) what weight he and his Department have given to evidence of ongoing problems with Glenfarm, in light of almost 7000 objections lodged against the proposed incinerator at Glenavy.

(AQW 966/11)

Minister of the Environment:

- (i) (a) NIEA has received the following numbers of complaints relating to odour in the area around Ulster Farm By Products facility since it was first permitted in November 2005. Prior to that Lisburn City Council was responsible for regulation of the Company.

Year	No. of Complaints
Nov – Dec 2005	18
Jan – Dec 2006	229
Jan – Dec 2007	187
Jan – Dec 2008	258
Jan – Dec 2009	131
Jan – Sept 2010	106

- (i) (b) A dossier of information entitled 'Ulster Farm By-products Ltd: Record of Environmental Issues Arising at the site 2003 -2009' was submitted to me by representatives of Communities Against Lough Neagh Incinerator (CALNI) during a meeting that I facilitated with them on 23 November 2009.

The same dossier of information was submitted to the Planning Service on 8 October 2009 by representatives of CALNI.

My executive colleague, Minister Arlene Foster has confirmed that, the Chief Executive of Invest Northern Ireland received a dossier containing a Record of Environmental Issues Arising at the Ulster Farm By Products Site in Glenavy from 2003 – 2009 as part of a presentation from the Communities Against Lough Neagh Incinerator (CALNI).

- (ii) NIEA has taken enforcement action against Ulster Farm By-Products in relation to its effluent discharge to the Glenavy River and for other aspects of the operation which may have contributed to odour. The company has been prosecuted on eight occasions over the period 2002 – 2008 for offences concerning the effluent discharge, but to NIEA's knowledge no further breaches have occurred since October 2008. Four enforcement notices were issued during 2006 - 2008 for other aspects of the operation. NIEA will continue to work with the company to achieve consistent compliance with all legal requirements and to take appropriate enforcement action as required.
- (iii) 6782 letters of objection and 1 objection petition have been received by Planning Service in relation to the two Rose Energy planning applications. I can confirm that all objection issues have been fully considered by Planning Service in their determination of the two planning applications. The issues contained within the dossier of information regarding the adjacent Ulster Farm By-Products facility have been given appropriate weight by the Department in the determination of the Rose Energy proposal.

Planning Applications

Ms D Purvis asked the Minister of the Environment, in light of his recent statements on the surplus of Planning Service staff, how many planning applications are currently waiting to be assigned to a case officer.

(AQW 994/11)

Minister of the Environment: At 6 October 2010 the numbers of planning applications awaiting assignment to a case officer in each Divisional Office were as follows:

Divisional Office	Number of applications awaiting assignment
Ballymena	27
Belfast	82
Headquarters	6
Craigavon	71
Downpatrick	49
Coleraine and Londonderry	35
Omagh and Enniskillen	81
Total	351

These figures are subject to change on a daily basis as new applications are received. In addition, the recent introduction of a new computer system in Belfast, Craigavon and Headquarters is skewing the figures in those Divisions as new processes are introduced and the systems are embedded.

It should be noted that 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.

Neighbourhood Renewal

Ms J McCann asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the services currently funded, fully or partly, by his Department under Neighbourhood Renewal in the West Belfast constituency.

(AQW 999/11)

Minister of the Environment: My Department does not fund services under Neighbourhood Renewal in the West Belfast constituency.

Public Hire Taxi Vehicles

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of the Environment what is the average age of public hire taxi vehicles currently operating.

(AQW 1017/11)

Minister of the Environment: The average age of public hire taxi vehicles operating in Northern Ireland is seven years.

Traffic Collisions on the Seven Mile Straight

Mr D Kinahan asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of (i) recorded traffic collisions; and (ii) fatal traffic collisions on the Seven Mile Straight in (a) 1990; and (b) each year since 2000.

(AQW 1047/11)

Minister of the Environment: The Police Service of Northern Ireland collates statistics on road traffic collisions on public roads where persons are injured. My Department has no role in this matter and therefore does not hold the information requested.

I would recommend that you address your question to the Chief Constable as this is a PSNI operational matter.

Complaints in Relation to Air and Water Pollution

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the total number of complaints which have been made in relation to (i) air pollution; and (ii) water pollution against (a) Foyle Proteins; (b) Dungannon Meats; and (c) Ulster Farm By-Products in each of the last five years.

(AQW 1050/11)

Minister of the Environment:

- (i) Dunbia Dungannon (previously Dungannon Meats) and Linden Foods operate beef and lamb slaughtering facilities located in the Granville Industrial Estate, Dungannon. NIEA also regulates Linergy (a rendering operation serving Dunbia and Linden Foods in the same area) which can give rise to odour complaints.

The Foyle Food Group operates a slaughtering facility (Foyle Meats) and a rendering plant (Foyle Proteins) at Lisahally, Campsie. Both facilities are regulated under a single permit. Any complaints received are attributed to the Group and not the individual operation.

Information on complaints about releases to air, including odour, allegedly from these sites has been included in Table 1 below along with the dates that the sites were permitted under the Pollution Prevention and Control Regulations (NI) 2003.

TABLE 1 – AIR POLLUTION COMPLAINTS

	Dunbia Dungannon	Linden Foods	Linergy	Foyle Proteins/ Meats	Ulster Farm By Products
Date permitted	October 2006	June 2005	July 2007	August 2006	November 2005
Year	No. of Complaints (air)				
2005	0	0	0	0	18
2006	0	0	0	0	229
2007	0	0	0	110	187
2008	1	1	23	145	258
2009	2	0	15	116	131
Jan – Sept 2010	2	2	18	156	106

- (ii) The numbers of complaints of suspected water pollution in relation to these sites are set out in Table 2 below. Ulster Farm By Products is the only company that discharges treated effluent into a watercourse. Rain water run off from all sites enters the local river network.

TABLE 2 – WATER POLLUTION COMPLAINTS

	Dunbia Dungannon	Linden Foods	Linergy	Foyle Proteins/ Meats	Ulster Farm By Products
Year	No. of Complaints (water)				
2005	0	0	0	0	5
2006	0	0	0	0	1
2007	1	0	0	0	1
2008	0	0	0	0	7
2009	1	0	0	0	2
Jan – Sept 2010	0	0	0	0	0

Ulster Farm By-Products site in Glenavy

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of the Environment whether the Ulster Farm By-Products site in Glenavy is fit for purpose; and whether it is meeting the terms and conditions of its operating licence.

(AQW 1051/11)

Minister of the Environment: The Ulster Farm By-Products facility at Glenavy is permitted under the Pollution Prevention and Control Regulations (NI) 2003. The permit contains conditions reflecting NIEA's view of 'Best Available Techniques' for control of emissions from the installation. The techniques employed on the site, including those for odour abatement are in line with those used on similar plants in the rest of Northern Ireland and throughout the UK. A proposal to install a higher exhaust stack to improve dispersion is currently awaiting planning permission.

NIEA has taken enforcement action against Ulster Farm By-Products for failing to comply with permit conditions. The company was prosecuted on eight occasions over the period 2002–2008 for offences concerning the effluent discharge, but to NIEA's knowledge no further breaches have occurred since October 2008. Four enforcement notices were issued during 2006 - 2008 for other aspects of the operation. NIEA will continue to assess the company's compliance with its permit and take appropriate enforcement action where necessary.

Translation of Departmental Papers

Mr A Bresland asked the Minister of the Environment how much his Department spent on the translation of departmental papers into (i) Irish; and (ii) Ulster-Scots in (a) 2007/08; (b) 2008/09; and (c) 2009/10.

(AQW 1089/11)

Minister of the Environment: The table below outlines the costs incurred by my Department on the translation of departmental papers into Irish and Ulster-Scots between 2007/08 and 2009/10.

	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
Irish	£1,313.32	£5,626.95	£230.00
Ulster-Scots	£275.17	£370.00	-
Total	£1,588.49	£5,996.95	£230.00

Probationary Period for Approved Driving Instructors

Mr J Spratt asked the Minister of the Environment how long is the probationary period for Approved Driving Instructors in Northern Ireland compared to the rest of the UK.

(AQW 1130/11)

Minister of the Environment: In Northern Ireland the Driver & Vehicle Agency administers the register of approved driving instructors on behalf of the Department of the Environment under the provisions of The Road Traffic (Northern Ireland) Order 2007. The Driving Standards Agency carries out the same function for the Department for Transport in Great Britain.

There is no probationary period for approved driving instructors in either NI or GB. However, all trainee driving instructors must take and pass the three parts of a qualifying examination, ie, theory, practical and instructional ability tests, within two years of passing the theory test.

Air Pollution Incident in Glenavy

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 970/11, to explain why a similar air pollution incident appears to have occurred in the vicinity of Ulster Farm By-Products' premises in Glenavy on 8 October 2010,

(AQW 1171/11)

Minister of the Environment: Pursuant to AQW 970/11, there was a further period of operation with cooker gas by-passing the plant condensers, which gave rise to a steamy plume. This mode of operation commenced due to an ongoing problem with the effluent treatment plant. This mode of operation is in line with the original plant designs and is likely to continue until the effluent treatment plant problems are resolved. NIEA officials are liaising with the company to seek resolution of the problem.

Houses in Multiple Occupation

Dr A McDonnell asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 737/11, if he can confirm that the statistics requested are identical to those statistics requested and confirmed in AQW 7400/09.

(AQW 1305/11)

Minister of the Environment: I can confirm that the statistics requested are identical to those statistics requested and confirmed in AQW 7400/09. The statistics represent the best information currently available and are provided by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE).

NIHE is currently involved in the major task of re surveying areas of Belfast as part of the Statutory Registration Scheme. Eventually the survey work will allow both Planning Service and NIHE to update the statistics.

The HMO sector is dynamic and the number of HMO properties will change over time as some properties become vacant or are demolished. Recent planning applications would suggest that others will, eventually, cease to be HMOs when development or improvements works are undertaken. Planning Service is also aware of a limited number of new HMOs which are operating without planning approval and enforcement action is being considered in such instances. The indications are that the total number of HMOs will fall.

Department of Finance and Personnel

Civil Service Staff Subject to Disciplinary Action

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many Civil Service staff in each Department have been (i) dismissed; (ii) suspended; and (iii) subject to disciplinary action in each of the last 5 years, broken down by the nature of the offence for which they were disciplined.

(AQW 470/11)

Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr S Wilson): The information requested is provided in the attached tables. The information has not been broken down by Department as individuals may be identifiable and this information is protected by Data Protection legislation. The data sourced is for each financial year and include both industrial and non-industrial staff for the period.

(i) Civil Service Staff dismissed

	2005/ 2006	2006/ 2007	2007/ 2008	2008/ 2009	2009/ 2010	Total
Total	94	105	79	86	84	448

(ii) Civil Service Staff suspended

	2005/ 2006	2006/ 2007	2007/ 2008	2008/ 2009	2009/ 2010	Total
Total	28	30	15	10	13	96

(iii) Civil Service Staff subject to disciplinary action

	2005/ 2006	2006/ 2007	2007/ 2008	2008/ 2009	2009/ 2010	Total
Total	115	245	186	117	117	780

Departmental Private Secretaries

Mr B Armstrong asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel why some Departmental Private Secretaries are remaining in post longer than the two year period that was intended.

(AQW 631/11)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: Each Department is responsible for the management of its Private Secretary appointments. The length of these appointments will be dependant on the business requirements of the employing Department. Appointments to Private Secretary posts are made via trawls or interest circulars. An elective transfer is not an appropriate means of filling a Private Secretary post.

Embargo on Promotion within the Civil Service

Mr B Armstrong asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, given that there is currently an embargo on promotion within the Civil Service, why Staff Officers are not being afforded the opportunity of an elective transfer in to Departmental Private Secretary posts, which provide developmental opportunities and to which the appointment is for a two year period only.

(AQW 632/11)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: Each Department is responsible for the management of its Private Secretary appointments. The length of these appointments will be dependant on the business requirements of the employing Department. Appointments to Private Secretary posts are made via trawls or interest circulars. An elective transfer is not an appropriate means of filling a Private Secretary post.

Rate Exclusions

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to AQW 391/11, what rate exclusions will apply to properties that are vacant due to probate.

(AQW 942/11)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: As the central finance department, the Department of Finance and Personnel does not have responsibility for funding childcare provision. DFP has not provided funding for childcare provision in the last three years.

Urban Regeneration Programme

Ms C Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to AQW 361/11, to detail the 64 currently unfunded commitments relating to the Urban Regeneration Programme, including the location and cost of each unfunded commitment.

(AQW 1034/11)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The information you request was supplied to me by the Minister for Social Development in the context of evidence to support an In-year Monitoring bid. As I am sure you will appreciate, it would be inappropriate for me to provide information at that level of detail without recourse to the DSD Minister. I suggest that you should approach the DSD Minister directly for the required information.

Preparation for Migration to Account NI

Mr M McLaughlin asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how much his Department spent on (i) consultancy; (ii) contract costs; (iii) staff costs; and (iv) other costs in preparation for migration to Account NI.

(AQW 1052/11)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: It is not possible to separately identify costs which are purely associated with preparation for migration to Account NI.

The costs provided in the attached table include expenditure incurred by Account NI during the implementation phase from 1 April 2006 to 30 October 2009. This includes maintenance and decommissioning of the legacy systems; the design, build, test and delivery of the Account NI solution to 11 departments through to stabilisation, as well as the day-to-day transaction processing service and associated managed service costs incurred in this period.

Costs	April 06 - Oct 09 £000
Consultancy	8,204
Contract costs	34,738
Staff costs	13,760
Other costs	2,732
Total Implementation costs	59,434

Comprehensive Spending Review

Mr C Lyttle asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of whether any financial support package is expected, as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review, in addition to the Barnett Formula derived Block Grant, to recognise the particular circumstances of Northern Ireland.

(AQW 1062/11)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: Along with the First Minister and deputy First Minister I will continue to make representations to Treasury ministers on the need to deliver a Spending Review outcome that addresses the needs of the Northern Ireland economy.

However, at the moment I am not aware of any support package being constructed outside of the Barnett formula.

Neighbourhood Renewal in the West Belfast Constituency

Ms J McCann asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the services currently funded, fully or partly, by his Department under Neighbourhood Renewal in the West Belfast constituency.
(AQW 1064/11)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: My Department does not currently fund any services under Neighbourhood Renewal in the West Belfast constituency.

Projects Undertaken by Groups for People with Disabilities

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what grants or funding schemes are available from his Department, or its arms-length bodies, to assist with projects undertaken by (i) groups for people with disabilities; or (ii) residential care facilities which cater for people with disabilities.
(AQW 1080/11)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: My department and the Special EU Programmes Body, for which DFP is the sponsor department, do not make any specific funding available for (i) groups for people with disabilities; or (ii) residential care facilities which cater for people with disabilities. However, the department through the Special EU Programmes Body is responsible for a number of schemes to which these groups can apply if they meet the eligibility criteria.

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Legal Fees

Mr J O'Dowd asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 39/11, to detail the amount of legal fees paid out by the legacy Craigavon Area Hospital Trust, prior to the establishment of the Directorate of Legal Services in 2008, to private legal practitioners in regard to outstanding medical negligence cases (i) between 5-10 years old; and (ii) over 10 years old.
(AQW 677/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Mr M McGimpsey): I am advised by the Southern HSC Trust that the legacy Craigavon Area Hospital HSS Trust made the following payments to a private legal practice for handling medical negligence claims on their behalf:

Time ongoing	No of cases	Amount paid
5-10 years	17	£32,253
Over 10 years	4	£6,047

Compensation Payments for Clinical Negligence

Mr J O'Dowd asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many of the recommendations of the Audit Office report, 'Compensation Payments for Clinical Negligence' published in July 2002, have been implemented by his Department to date; and to outline how each recommendation has been implemented.
(AQW 678/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department has taken action to implement all the recommendations made in the 2002 NI Audit Office report 'Compensation Payments for Clinical Negligence'.

Following publication of the Audit Office report, my Department issued a guidance circular in 2002 to HSC organisations advising on action to be taken to address the recommendations in the report, and to improve processes for handling clinical negligence claims.

My Department subsequently reviewed this circular, along with all other existing guidance on clinical negligence. As a result of this, a revised guidance circular issued in 2010, which is now the single point of reference for HSC organisations in the management of claims.

The circular introduced improved arrangements for maintaining information on claims, and for submitting regular reports on this to my Department. HSC organisations are required to maintain a database of information on all claims against their organisation, and to submit a summary of this information to my Department regularly. This information will be used to improve monitoring on progress of cases, to identify any trends emerging and any lessons which may be learnt.

The circular also requires that HSC organisations provide my Department with assurance that they have effective governance arrangements in place to deal with clinical negligence issues, that they review open cases annually, and comply with the clinical negligence pre-action protocol.

A single model of risk management has been introduced across the HSC, and in 2007/08 my Department completed the roll out of the Controls Assurance Standards. Substantive compliance with the core standards of risk management, governance and financial management was achieved by all 17 of my Department's Arms Length Bodies in 2009/10.

My Department considered in 2009 the adequacy of the existing financial management arrangements for clinical negligence, and concluded that introducing a risk pooling arrangement might add to the financial risk while RPA structures were being implemented. A further review is planned for 2011/12.

Key recommendations from Best Practice-Best Care have been implemented. The Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) was established in 2005. A Clinical and Social Care Governance Support Team was established to help develop clinical and social care governance arrangements, including audit in the HSC, and has since been replaced by the NI Safety Forum.

Quality Standards for the HSC were issued in March 2006 to provide a standardised approach to clinical/social care governance and a number of care standards have been developed for regulated services – both have been used by RQIA to inspect the quality of services being provided by the HSC and the independent sector. Formal links have been established with national standard-setting bodies to ensure the HSC has access to national best practice advice and guidance.

Appraisal for all doctors is now in place and is a contractual obligation. My Department is working closely with the General Medical Council towards implementation of medical revalidation which will require doctors to demonstrate every five years that their knowledge and skills are up to date and they remain fit to practice.

My Department established a process for reporting serious adverse incidents in 2004. Findings from analysis of reported incidents and lessons learned have been disseminated on a regular basis to the HSC. Following a review of these arrangements in 2008, a new Regional Adverse Incident and Learning System is currently being developed which will encompass learning arising from complaints, clinical negligence claims and adverse incidents.

Good Management Good Records (GMGR) was published by my Department in 2004 to provide guidance which includes the minimum retention periods for HSC records. GMGR is currently being reviewed and the revised version is expected in early 2011. A records management controls assurance standard was introduced in 2005 and organisations are required to assess themselves annually against this standard.

A circular on Confidentiality clauses in settlement of compensation claims issued in June 2003, and a revised circular issued in October of the same year.

Revised valuation methodology, incorporating contingent liabilities, was introduced for 2002/03 accounts and in 2008/09 valuations were further reduced to bring them into line with historical trends. Work is ongoing to further refine valuations.

Comparisons have been made between costs associated with clinical negligence in Northern Ireland and other UK jurisdictions. However it has proven difficult to make meaningful comparisons, as

statistics from the other jurisdictions do not include expenditure on personal social services claims, costs associated with large single claims can significantly distort the position in individual years, and this information has not been readily available from other jurisdictions. Further discussions may take place in the future.

Medical Negligence Cases

Mr J O'Dowd asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in light of his announcement to the Assembly on 21 September 2010 that 23 medical negligence cases over ten years old have now been closed, to detail the amount paid out in legal fees in these cases; and how long each case had been outstanding.

(AQW 679/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: As a result of a recent review of medical negligence cases open for more than ten years, 23 cases have now been closed. A total of £14,616.76 was incurred in legal costs by the Directorate of Legal Services in respect of these cases since time-recording for individual cases began at the end of 1996. Details on the duration and legal costs of each of these are set out in the table below.

Duration of Case	Legal Costs Incurred*
12 years, 10 months	£474.73
15 years, 1 month	£728.90
11 years, 6 months	£1,361.88
10 years, 3 months	£474.43
17 years, 3 months	£298.00
15 years, 7 months	£870.28
14 years, 5 months	£438.23
11 years, 9 months	£1,270.69
15 years, 1 month	£812.52
12 years, 1 month	£238.44
11 years	£262.06
12 years, 6 months	£485.36
12 years	£1,321.25
18 years	£281.23
18 years, 6 months	£245.81
17 years, 6 months	£243.71
15 years, 6 months	£333.69
12 years, 9 months	£806.35
12 years, 3 months	£1660.79
15 years	£568.58
14 years, 3 months	£982.26
19 years, 8 months	£191.61
16 years, 9 months	£265.96

* Legal costs incurred by DLS from the end of 1996 when DLS commenced time-recording for individual cases.

Childcare

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how his Department is contributing to the provision of childcare and a Childcare Strategy.

(AQW 694/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department contributes to the provision of childcare through the Regulation and Inspection of child minding and childcare as set out in Part XI of the Children's (Northern Ireland) Order 1995, the statutory functions of which are delegated through the Health and Social Care Board to the Health and Social Care Trusts.

With regard to a Childcare strategy, my Department is represented on the cross-departmental steering group overseeing the economic and policy appraisal on a Childcare Strategy, established under the Ministerial Sub-Committee on Children and Young People and will continue to engage in this process.

Out-of-Hours GP Services

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether an equality impact assessment was carried out on the changes currently being made to Out-of-Hours GP services and to outline any concerns identified as a result of the assessment.

(AQW 696/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: An equality impact assessment was not carried out because there will be no change to the way patients access out-of-hours services.

Speech and Language Therapists

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many Speech and Language Therapist positions are currently funded by the South Eastern Trust in Tor Bank School in Dundonald.

(AQW 707/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust does not fund any such posts in Tor Bank School. Belfast Health and Social Care Trust provides funding for 1.2 Whole Time Equivalent (WTE) Speech and Language Therapists and 0.85 WTE Speech and Language Therapy Assistants at the school.

Occupational Health Therapists

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many Occupational Health Therapist positions are currently funded by the South Eastern Trust in Tor Bank School in Dundonald.

(AQW 708/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust does not fund any such posts in Tor Bank School. Belfast Health and Social Care Trust provide funding for 1.32 Whole Time Equivalent Occupational Therapist posts at the school.

GUM services

Ms A Lo asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he would consider allowing Family Planning Clinics or GPs to provide genito-urinary medicine (GUM) services, given the difficulty in accessing GUM services at the GUM clinic in the Royal Victoria Hospital.

(AQW 721/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Sexual Health Promotion Strategy aims to improve, protect and promote the sexual health and well-being of the population in Northern Ireland. Recognising the role of GPs and community services in support of the implementation of the Strategy, the multi-agency Sexual Health Improvement Network is establishing a sub-group to explore how

sexual health services are currently delivered in primary care with a view to improving access including community based programs.

McDermott Brothers Case

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether Western Health and Social Care Trust staff explored or put forward a Least Restrictive Option in relation to James & Owen Roe McDermott.

(AQW 727/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I am not at liberty to discuss individual cases. However, in such cases the Trust would be expected to offer its view as to the suitability of each of the options available to the court under the Mental Health Order (NI) 1986.

Health Service

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline what measures are currently in place to reduce (i) drug abuse; (ii) alcohol abuse; (iii) smoking; and (iv) obesity, in order to reduce the financial strain on the Health Service.

(AQW 733/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department continues to lead on the development of a number of cross-sectoral, inter-departmental health promotion strategies that seek to improve the health of the population, address inequalities in health, and therefore reduce the burden these issues and related health conditions place on the Health and Social Care System. These include:

- (i)/(ii) the **New Strategic Direction for Alcohol and Drugs** – which seeks to reduce the harm related to alcohol and drug misuse in Northern Ireland;
- (iii) the **Tobacco Control Strategy** – which will set out my Department's plans for reducing smoking prevalence in Northern Ireland over the next ten years; and
- (iv) **Fit Futures** – which seeks to address childhood obesity – and the forthcoming **Fitter Futures for All** – which will address obesity across the lifecourse.

Implementation of policy in these areas is led by the Public Health Agency, working in partnership with key stakeholders such as local government, Education and Library Boards, Neighbourhood Renewal Partnerships, the voluntary and community sector, etc.

Smoking Related Diseases

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the cost to the Health Service of smoking related diseases in each of the last three financial years.

(AQW 734/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information on the cost to the Health Service of smoking related diseases for each of the last three financial years is not available.

McDermott Brothers Case

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether any additional payments were made to staff employed by his Department who provided reports into the James and Owen Roe McDermott case for Court purposes; and if so, to whom these payments were made and the total cost of the payments.

(AQW 743/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I am advised that the Western Trust did not make any additional payments to their staff who either provided reports or gave evidence in this court case. The payment of witness expenses is a matter for those who brought the witness to court.

Neurological Services

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action he intends to take to protect specialised neurological services.

(AQW 744/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Health and Social Care Board is responsible for the commissioning of services to meet the needs of the population, including specialised neurological services. The Board will therefore consider any proposed changes to the provision of these services in that context.

Physiotherapists

Ms M Ritchie asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action he is taking to secure the employment of more physiotherapists in clinics and hospitals.

(AQW 745/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The recruitment and selection of staff and associated employment opportunities is a matter for HSC Trusts, based on service needs and available resources. My Department carries out regional workforce planning to help ensure that suitable qualified staff are available to meet the needs of the Health Service. Workforce forecasts are regularly reviewed and corrective action is taken where necessary.

Fireworks Related Injuries

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many incidents of fireworks related injuries were recorded in each Health and Social Care Trust in each of the last five years.

(AQW 763/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information on the number of patients reporting to A&E Departments and Minor Injuries Units with injuries from fireworks, over a selected four week period covering the end of October and start of November (Halloween period) in each of the last 5 years is published annually and is available from:

http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/stats_research/stats-activity_stats-2/firework_statistics.htm

Services Provided by Craigavon Area Hospital and Lurgan Hospital

Mr S Anderson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to list all the services currently provided by (i) Craigavon Area Hospital; and (ii) Lurgan Hospital.

(AQW 764/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Southern Health and Social Care Trust provides information about its hospital services on the Trust's website. Information about Craigavon and Lurgan Hospitals may be found at

www.southerntrust.hscni.net/services/cahgt%20services/index.html#P-1_0

Doctors' Bonuses

Mr S Anderson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline his Department's policy on the payment of bonuses to doctors.

(AQW 765/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Doctors do not receive bonus payments.

Efficiencies

Mr S Anderson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail any efficiencies he has identified that could be implemented by his Department over the next three years; and the total estimated savings these efficiencies would bring.

(AQW 766/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Speculation on how savings will be delivered over the next three years is something that I will not be drawn into. It is impossible to make a full and considered assessment without knowledge of the level of funding that will be made available to my Department over CSR 2010.

However it must be recognised that the scope for delivering efficiencies in the years ahead will be limited by the Department's achievements to date. The HSC has already delivered considerable savings as part of the Review of Public Administration with around 1,700 posts being removed. In total HSC Organisations will deliver £700m of efficiency savings by the end of 2010/11 as the result of improvements in pharmacy, productivity and RPA .

Causeway Hospital

Mr M Storey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to list any services that have been withdrawn from the Causeway Hospital since it was opened.

(AQW 767/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: While the delivery of services at the Causeway Hospital is a matter for the Northern Health and Social Care Trust as the service provider, I can advise that no services have been withdrawn from the hospital and the Trust continues to deliver a comprehensive range of services to its local population including 24/7 A&E, paediatrics, day surgery services, outpatients and diagnostics including radiology and laboratory tests.

In addition the Trust has also made significant developments in some services such as urology; stroke and nurse led cardiac services.

Causeway Hospital

Mr M Storey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to list any services that have been added to the Causeway Hospital in the last five years.

(AQW 768/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: While the delivery of services at the Causeway Hospital is a matter for the Northern Health and Social Care Trust as the service provider, I can advise that no services have been withdrawn from the hospital and the Trust continues to deliver a comprehensive range of services to its local population including 24/7 A&E, paediatrics, day surgery services, outpatients and diagnostics including radiology and laboratory tests.

In addition the Trust has also made significant developments in some services such as urology; stroke and nurse led cardiac services.

Accident and Emergency Provision at the Causeway Hospital

Mr M Storey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what discussions he has had with the Northern Health and Social Care Trust in relation to Accident and Emergency provision at the Causeway Area Hospital.

(AQW 769/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: While the delivery of services at the Causeway Hospital is a matter for the Northern Health and Social Care Trust as the service provider, I can advise that no services have been withdrawn from the hospital and the Trust continues to deliver a

comprehensive range of services to its local population including 24/7 A&E, paediatrics, day surgery services, outpatients and diagnostics including radiology and laboratory tests.

In addition the Trust has also made significant developments in some services such as urology; stroke and nurse led cardiac services.

Robinson Memorial Hospital in Ballymoney

Mr M Storey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the current level of service provision at Robinson Memorial Hospital in Ballymoney.

(AQW 770/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: While the delivery of services at the Robinson Memorial Hospital is a matter for the Northern Health and Social Care Trust as the service provider, I can advise that the Robinson Hospital is a 25 bed intermediate care unit supported by a multi-disciplinary team and palliative care consultant. The profile of services includes general rehabilitation, orthopaedic and intermediate level palliative care.

Proposed Provision of a New Fire Brigade Area Command in Ballymena

Mr M Storey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the proposed provision of a new fire brigade area command in Ballymena.

(AQW 771/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I understand from the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service that it has identified a potential site for a new Fire Station and Area Headquarters and that a feasibility study has recently been completed.

European Centre for Connected Health

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 185/11, how much funding his Department has provided to the European Centre for Connected Health in each year since it was established.

(AQW 783/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The European Centre for Connected Health was established in 2008. The table below shows the funding that my Department has made available to the organisation.

Year	Funding
2008/09	£901,000
2009/10	£827,000
2010/11	£550,000

Causeway Hospital

Mr M Storey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to list the services currently provided by the Causeway Hospital.

(AQW 791/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: While the delivery of services at the Causeway Hospital is a matter for the Northern Health and Social Care Trust as the service provider, I can advise that no services have been withdrawn from the hospital and the Trust continues to deliver a comprehensive range of services to its local population including 24/7 A&E, paediatrics, day surgery services, outpatients and diagnostics including radiology and laboratory tests.

In addition the Trust has also made significant developments in some services such as urology; stroke and nurse led cardiac services.

Free Prescriptions

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the cost to the Health Service of free prescriptions in the first five months of this financial year compared to the same period last year when a £3 prescription charge was in operation.

(AQW 801/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Cost information is not available for the first five months of 2010-11.

Ulster Hospital Accident and Emergency Unit

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many patients have had to wait on hospital trolleys in the Ulster Hospital Accident and Emergency Unit in each of the last four weeks.

(AQW 805/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information on the number of patients who have waited on trolleys in the Ulster Hospital Accident and Emergency Unit in each of the last four weeks is not available.

Hospital Trolleys

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many patients in each Accident and Emergency unit have had to wait on hospital trolleys in each of the last six months.

(AQW 806/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information on the number of patients in each Accident and Emergency unit who have waited on trolleys in each of the last six months is not available.

Direct Payments

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what information is collected on the number of people in each Health and Social Care Trust area who avail of direct payments.

(AQW 807/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information on direct payments paid during the quarter is presented by Health and Social Care Trust at:

http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/stats_research/stats-cib-3/statistics_and_research-cib-guide/statistics_and_research-cib-direct-payment.htm

Accident and Emergency Unit at the Lagan Valley Hospital

Mr P Givan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what steps have been taken to ensure that the Accident and Emergency Unit at the Lagan Valley Hospital has the full complement of staff necessary to provide 24 hour acute services.

(AQW 809/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The recruitment and employment of appropriate staff to deliver services is primarily the responsibility of Health and Social Care Trusts. The South Eastern HSC Trust has advised that it has taken a number of steps to maintain the emergency department service at Lagan Valley Hospital including working with the Northern Ireland Medical and Dental Training Agency in respect of junior doctor placements, contacting local and UK-wide agencies for temporary locums, advertising for locums, asking staff to do extra shifts and consultants to cover night duties in the hospital rather than on call. The Trust continues to monitor the situation on a daily basis.

Advertising Campaigns on the Dangers of Sunbeds and Skin Cancer

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for a breakdown of the total money spent on the recent advertising campaigns regarding the dangers of sunbeds and skin cancer.
(AQW 818/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The total costs of the Public Health Agency's sunbeds awareness campaign are £94,603. This total comprises £56,183 for television advertising; £20,540 for outdoor advertising; £10,929 for online advertising and £6,951 for the printing and distribution of leaflets and posters and for the campaign launch. Mental Health Services at the Ulster Hospital.

Mental Health: Ulster and Lagan Valley Hospitals

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why Mental Health services are being moved from the Ulster Hospital to Lagan Valley Hospital.
(AQW 834/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The South Eastern Trust's proposals to modernise its mental health services would enable the Trust to provide a Centre of Excellence for those requiring hospital admission while at the same time ensuring the enhancement of alternative community services.

Mental Health Service Provision at the Newtownards and Ulster Hospital Sites

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans he has for Mental Health service provision at the Newtownards and Ulster Hospital sites over the next three years.
(AQW 835/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The South Eastern Trust has invested very significantly in developing community Mental Health resources in the North Down and Ards area over this last year.

Additional resources invested in community services have provided a new Crisis House, additional community staff focusing on Home Treatment, psychological therapies and eating disorder services.

The focus in mental health service provision is on treating more people with mental illness in their own homes. This will lead to better patient outcomes, and will also reduce the need for many people to be admitted to hospital or reduce actual length of hospital stay for the patient.

Youth Provision Mental Health Beds

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many youth provision Mental Health beds are there currently in the South Eastern Trust.
(AQW 836/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: In-patient Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) are provided to the South Eastern Trust by the Belfast Trust. The South Eastern Trust has access to CAMHS beds at Beechgrove, the regional Child and Adolescent Unit, at which there are 18 beds for adolescents (14 – 17 years) and 15 beds at the Child and Family Centre for those under age 14.

Mental Health Beds at the Ulster Hospital

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many many Mental Health beds are being moved from the Ulster Hospital to the Lagan Valley Hospital.
(AQW 839/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The South Eastern Trusts consultation on its 'Strategic Direction for Mental Health Services in South Eastern Trust' closed in September 2010. It would be inappropriate for me to comment until all the responses have been considered.

Youth Provision Mental Health Beds

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many Youth Provision Mental Health beds there are currently in all Health and Social Care Trusts.

(AQW 840/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: In-patient Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) are provided regionally by the Belfast Trust. Each Trust has access to CAMHS beds at Beechgrove, the regional Child and Adolescent Unit, at which there are 18 beds for adolescents (14 – 17 years) and 15 beds at the Child and Family Centre for those under age 14.

Displays of Tobacco Products

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what evidence, from United Kingdom research, his Department has that point of sale displays of tobacco products encourages purchases by customers; and whether any of this evidence dates from after the ban on smoking in workplaces and public buildings.

(AQW 850/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My main aim in introducing this new legislation is to prevent our children and young people from taking up the smoking habit. Research, undertaken by Cancer Research UK, has shown that point of sale displays increase young people's awareness of tobacco brands and that this in turn can increase a young person's intention to smoke by 35 per cent. The Cancer Research UK report also found that tobacco point of sale stimulates impulse purchases amongst established smokers and undermines efforts to quit.

This report is referenced in the Regulatory Impact Assessment which accompanies the draft Northern Ireland tobacco control regulations currently out for public consultation.

The Cancer Research UK report was published in August 2008 and was the result of a longitudinal research study based on nearly 4,500 UK teenagers over seven years. This bulk of evidence contained in this report would therefore predate the ban on smoking in workplaces and public buildings.

McDermott Brothers Case

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when his Department first became aware of the findings of the McDermott sexual abuse case which was published on 24 July 2010; and when he was made aware of these findings.

(AQW 860/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department became aware of concerns in relation to this case on 25 June and I was informed on the same day.

Guidance on the Use of Pharmaceuticals

Ms A Lo asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how guidance on the use of pharmaceuticals is issued to GPs, particularly in relation to any detrimental side effects.

(AQW 869/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: GPs receive information and guidance about the use and safety of medicines from a number of sources during the marketed life of a product, including: the British National Formulary (BNF), the Monthly Index of Medical Specialties (MIMS), guidance from the National Institute of Clinical Effectiveness (NICE) and information from the pharmaceutical industry.

In respect of side effects, the Medicines and Healthcare Regulatory Authority (MHRA) communicates with health professionals, including GPs, both to warn about adverse effects and to provide feedback of information, through:

- Updated Patient Information Leaflets (PILs) and Summaries of Product Characteristics (SPCs) for medicines when new safety issues are identified;

- Letters sent to all doctors and pharmacists by post or electronic cascade through DHSSPS, highlighting urgent warnings about drug hazards;
- Publication of safety information in the drug safety bulletin 'Drug Safety Update';
- Fact sheets on major safety issues, which are produced for both healthcare professionals and patients; and
- Safety alerts published on the MHRA website.

GPs working in the UK are required by their professional regulator, the General Medical Council (GMC), to keep their professional knowledge and skills up to date, which would include being familiar with current information and guidelines on the use of pharmaceuticals.

New Nursing Staff Uniforms

Mr F Molloy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to explain the rationale for changing the nursing staff uniform; and to detail the expected cost of this change.

(AQW 1057/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Patient safety is central to all decisions I take and the introduction of standardised HSC uniforms is no different. Changes to nursing uniforms are part of the drive to control and prevent the spread of health care associated infections.

Standardising uniforms has the added benefits of making staff easily recognisable to patients and aiding security. It also strengthens staff morale and professionalism across the sector.

Nursing uniforms are part of a regional contract to provide uniforms for all HSC staff. This has been awarded to a local supplier and is worth around £3.5m over the next five years. It will deliver savings of approximately 50% across the HSC due to the savings that can be achieved from having one supplier.

Value for Money Audit on Staff Travel and Subsistence

Mrs M O'Neill asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 4479/10, when the Value for Money Audit on staff travel and subsistence of October 2009 will be available to the general public.

(AQW 1133/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The report will be published on the Departmental Extranet shortly

Cataract Surgeries at the Downe Hospital

Ms M Ritchie asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many cataract surgeries have been held at the Downe Hospital since it opened in June 2009; and how many cataract removal surgeries have been transferred from the Downe Hospital to other hospitals.

(AQW 1188/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: From June 2009 to 31st March 2010, (the most recent period for which information is available), there were 111 cataract surgeries carried out in Downe Hospital.

Information is not collected centrally on the number of cataract removal surgeries which have been transferred from the Downe Hospital to other hospitals.

Elliot Dynes Rehabilitation Unit at the Royal Victoria Hospital

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 614/11, if Health Trust procedure was followed when some members of staff in the Elliot Dynes Unit of the Royal Victoria Hospital accepted an offer of voluntary redundancy only to have the offer withdrawn. (AQW 1215/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I am on record as saying that I need to retain the professionally qualified staff if the Health and Social Care is to continue to deliver the ever increasing demand for services.

The use of public money to fund the considerable cost of voluntary redundancy cannot be justified at a time when the service needs to retain particular skills. The Trust has followed the correct procedure by not allowing individuals to leave the HSC while there is a need for their skill; in this case valuable nursing skills.

Budget

Mr D McClarty asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the reasons why his Department's budget should be ring-fenced in the forthcoming spending review. (AQO 285/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: There are many reasons why my Department needs to be exempt from cuts:

- All DHSSPS functions - health, social care, fire - have a history of underfunding relative to other UK nations. Northern Ireland is underfunded by £640m compared when to England in respect of health and social care.
- England and Scotland are ring fencing health
- Last year we had the fastest growing population in the UK
- We are projected to have the fastest growing elderly population up to 2020
- NHS Pay deals are negotiated for the whole of the UK
- Demand will continue to grow
- As we get better at saving people from diseases that kill - diseases like cancer - we will have ongoing costs of care.
- Officials tell me we will need £5.4bn by 2014/15. If current cuts assumptions are applied equally to all Departments, I'm advised that I will end up with just £3.9bn.

NHS: Sign Language

Mr P Butler asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans he has to increase the number of sign-language interpreters in Health Trusts. (AQO 290/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Health and Social Care Trusts do not directly employ sign language interpreters; they are in fact service users through contracting out arrangements. A key objective of the ongoing work led by DCAL through the interdepartmental, multi-agency, Sign Language Partnership Group is to increase the numbers of Sign Language interpreters and tutors through projects supported by DCAL investment. Funding provided by DEL will also enhance course provision to increase the supply of qualified sign language interpreters in Northern Ireland.

Trigeminal Neuralgia

Mr S Gibson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the treatment currently offered to people with Trigeminal Neuralgia.

(AQO 291/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Trigeminal Neuralgia is rare and affects around 70 people each year in Northern Ireland. Medication is the first line of treatment but for patients whose condition does not respond to medication, surgery may be an option. It is for clinicians to decide on the most appropriate treatment for patients including whether a referral for specialist surgery may be appropriate.

Antrim Area Hospital

Mr P Girvan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what additional resources are available for the Antrim Area Hospital to cope with the increasing number of patients following the closure of the Accident and Emergency Unit at Whiteabbey Hospital.

(AQO 292/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I want people to attend A&E when they have a condition which needs immediate acute care – if it is a minor ailment they should continue to attend Whiteabbey Hospital where around 70% of patients will continue to be treated.

The reconfiguration of emergency care services includes the redesigning of the A&E treatment areas at Antrim Area hospital to develop a minor injuries area and the establishment of a ward to facilitate a 10 bed Clinical Decision Unit. This, together with an additional 11 inpatient beds, will ensure that patients are quickly triaged, resulting in a streamlined patient flow. These changes are also being supported by the availability of additional staff and the provision of increased ambulance cover in the Northern Trust area.

Rare Diseases

Mr P Doherty asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans his Department has to develop a rare diseases strategy.

(AQO 293/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The European Union defines a disease as rare if it affects fewer than 5 in every 10,000 people. In 2009 the European Council (EC) issued a Recommendation that member states should develop rare disease strategies to improve access to appropriate specialist care for patients with rare illnesses. My Department is fully engaged with all UK health departments in developing a national response to the EC Recommendation.

That response will include a UK national rare disease strategy which will bring together research, prevention, diagnosis, best practice in treatment and awareness to secure the best possible outcome for all UK patients.

NHS: Correspondence with Blind or Partially Sighted People

Mr J Wells asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the steps taken by his Department to ensure that any correspondence with blind or partially-sighted people in relation to appointments is formatted to suit their needs.

(AQO 294/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Health and Social Care Trusts employ the most accessible and suitable means of communication to meet the individual needs and preferences of patients who are known to be visually impaired. This can include the use of large print, Braille or Moon; the transcription of appointments, letters, and other documents onto audio CD or cassette; and the use of email. Furthermore, my Department will soon publish, for consultation, a draft Physical and Sensory Disability Strategy, which will provide regional strategic direction on this issue.

Respite Care

Ms M Ritchie asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the development of respite care facilities since May 2007.

(AQO 295/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Since May 2007 my Department has funded a number of projects that incorporate respite care facilities including:

- Child & Family Unit at Foster Green site (£6.5m total cost) completed mid-2010;
- Beltany Children's Home (£1.6m total cost) – scheduled for completion late 2010;
- Dungannon Respite Unit (£1.3m total cost) – completed in 2008/09;
- Conicar at Iveagh (£4m total cost) – completed July 2010;
- Newry Children's Home (£2.6m total cost) – completed Summer 2010;
- Forest Lodge (£2.1m total cost) – completed in 2008/09.

I have also invested additional resources in Learning Disability, Physical and Sensory Disability and Dementia respite services over the current CSR period. This will provide an additional 125 packages, 110 packages and 1200 places, respectively, in each of these programmes of care. Each package will benefit at least 4 families.

GP Visits

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether his Department has approved a proposal to introduce charges for GP visits and whether such a proposal has been passed to the Executive for consideration.

(AQO 296/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I have approved no such proposal.

Department of Justice

Work Carried Out by Prisoners

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) the average hours, per week, a sentenced prisoner works; and (ii) the average weekly remuneration paid to prisoners in each of the last five years.

(AQW 691/11)

Minister of Justice (Mr D Ford):

- (i) The Northern Ireland Prison Service records constructive activity hours which include offender behaviour programmes, education, work and attendance at the gymnasium. It is not possible to isolate the figures which relate exclusively to work activities.

Financial Year	Average constructive activity hours per week a sentenced prisoner works
05/06	20.3
06/07	20.9
07/08	19.7
08/09	20
09/10	20.6

(ii) The average weekly remuneration paid to each prisoner is tabled below.

Financial Year	Maghaberry	Magilligan	Hydebank Wood	Average NIPS weekly Remuneration
05/06	£8.14	£15.87	£10.66	£10.80
06/07	£7.79	£14.67	£12.21	£10.40
07/08	£8.40	£14.43	£15.10	£11.17
08/09	£8.97	£14.24	£14.69	£11.41
09/10	£9.98	£14.58	£14.46	£12.00

Prison Tuck Shops

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 7908/10, to list the current inventory or menu of items available for purchase in the prison tuck shop in each prison, including the cost of each item. **(AQW 881/11)**

Minister of Justice:

- (i) Each individual prison establishment has a considerable range of items which are sold to prisoners through 'tuck shops'. These include, but are not limited to, groceries, sweets, stationery, tobacco, electrical & audio items and toiletries.

Copies of the tuck shop price lists which detail the menu of items for sale at each establishment have been deposited in the Assembly library.

882/11 (ii) The following table shows the total spend at each establishment's tuck shop over the last five years:

	Total Sales £'s		
Financial Year	Hydebank Wood	Maghaberry	Magilligan
05 – 06	190,013.84	607,697.14	289,363.49
06 – 07	198,286.72	677,340.74	324,799.56
07 – 08	201,082.74	731,831.18	322,663.31
08 – 09	202,899.20	720,007.53	369,132.73
09 – 10	207,264.55	738,061.11	359,387.54

Prison Tuck Shops

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 7908/10, to detail (i) the items sold to prisoners at each tuck shop; and (ii) how much prisoners spent in total at each tuck shop in each prison, in each of the last five years. **(AQW 882/11)**

Minister of Justice:

- (i) Each individual prison establishment has a considerable range of items which are sold to prisoners through 'tuck shops'. These include, but are not limited to, groceries, sweets, stationery, tobacco, electrical & audio items and toiletries.

Copies of the tuck shop price lists which detail the menu of items for sale at each establishment have been deposited in the Assembly library.

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09 – 10	207,264.55	738,061.11	359,387.54

Prison Tuck Shops

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 7908/10, to detail the number of (i) recorded incidents of theft; and (ii) items recorded as lost or misplaced from tuck shops in each prison, in each of the last five years, including a list of these items and their value.

(AQW 885/11)

Minister of Justice: I am advised that there have been no recorded incidents of theft and no items recorded as lost or misplaced from any of the prison tuck shops.

Community Safety in North Belfast

Ms C Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) the level of funding by his Department for community safety in North Belfast, including groups based in the city centre, in each of the last three years; (ii) to where this funding has been allocated; (iii) the amount allocated in each case; and (iv) the duration of this funding.

(AQW 896/11)

Minister of Justice: The Department of Justice came into existence on 12 April 2010. Details of funding prior to that date are a matter for the Northern Ireland Office.

The budget allocated to Belfast Community Safety Partnership (CSP) for programme delivery throughout the council area for the 2010/2011 financial year is £398,884. I have detailed below those initiatives being delivered from this funding specifically in North Belfast and also those projects being delivered on a city wide basis. It is not however possible to accurately pinpoint the costs directly attributed to each area of the city for these wider initiatives and therefore the total costs have been provided. I have also listed a project directly funded by the Department, rather than by the CSP

Area	Group	Funding Awarded
North Belfast	Tigers Bay Concerned Residents Group	£1,000.00
North Belfast	Glencairn Residents Group	£1,000.00
North Belfast	Artillery Youth Centre	£1,000.00
North Belfast	First Step Centre	£1,000.00
North Belfast	North Belfast Interface Network	£1,000.00
North Belfast	Holy Family Youth Centre	£1,000.00

Area	Group	Funding Awarded
North Belfast	Tigers Bay Mens Group	£925.00
North Belfast	North Belfast Alternatives	£1,000.00
North Belfast	Ballysillan Youth For Christ Community Drop In Centre	£1,000.00
North Belfast	New Life Counselling	£1,000.00
North Belfast	Jennymount Community Association	£840.95
North Belfast	Greater Shankill Community Safety Network	£3,000
North Belfast	Ardoyne Fleadh	£5,000
North Belfast	Friends of the Waterworks	£500
North Belfast	Ligoniel Improvement Association	£500
North Belfast	Midland Tigers Bay Boxing Club	£500
North Belfast	Wolfhill Centre	£500
North Belfast	Fortwilliam Youth Club	£500
North Belfast	North Belfast Area Partnership Board	£1,400
North Belfast	Greater Shankill Area Partnership Board	£1,400

Area	Initiative	Funding Allocated
City wide	Anti-social Behaviour Fora	£5,000
City wide	Youth Outreach	£30,000
City wide	Youth Inclusion	£30,000
City wide	Off Licence Work	£10,000
City wide	Belfast Nite Zones	£20,000
City wide	Joint Enforcement	£10,000
City wide	Vintners Work	£2,500
City wide	Get Home Safe Campaign	£30,000
City wide	Parental Awareness Campaign	£10,000
City wide	Belfast Against Night Time Disorder	£5,000
City wide	Tension Monitoring	£40,000
City wide	Hate Crime Awareness Campaign	£15,500
City wide	Hate Crime Training & Engagement Programme	£20,000
City wide	Hate Crime Convention	£1,000
City wide	Information & Communication Officer	£42,000
City wide	Youth Awards	£17,500
City wide	Community Safety Good Practice Events	£10,000
City wide	Belfast Good Morning Project	£10,000

Area	Initiative	Funding Allocated
City wide	Intergenerational Project	£5,000
City wide	Safer Belfast Tasking	£35,384

Area	Initiative	Funding Allocated
North Belfast & City Centre	Drug Arrest Referral Scheme*	£216,000

* Project directly funded by Department of Justice through Belfast Health and Social Care Trust

The Compensation Agency

Ms D Purvis asked the Minister of Justice to detail the number of claims for injuries, related to the conflict, that were processed by the Compensation Agency since its inception in 1992; and the total amount paid out for these claims.

(AQW 996/11)

Minister of Justice: I am unable to provide the information you have requested as the Compensation Agency does not hold compensation details for injuries relating to the conflict in Northern Ireland separate from other criminal injury claims.

Damage Caused to Vehicles as a Result of Rioting

Mr S Moutray asked the Minister of Justice for an estimate of the cost of the damage caused to vehicles as a result of rioting in each of the last three years.

(AQW 1010/11)

Minister of Justice: I am unable to provide the information requested as the Compensation Agency cannot differentiate compensation paid for damage to vehicles as a result of rioting as opposed to other vehicle damage claims.

Hate Crime

Mr S Anderson asked the Minister of Justice to outline how 'perception' in relation to hate crime is evaluated and whether it is based upon fact.

(AQW 1013/11)

Minister of Justice: A hate crime is any incident, which constitutes a criminal offence, perceived by the victim or any other person as being motivated by prejudice or hate.

This definition was adopted by the Association of Chief Police Officers following a key recommendation of the MacPherson report into the murder of Stephen Lawrence. The perception-based model has been accepted and adopted by Criminal Justice Agencies in Northern Ireland, as the definition helps raise awareness of the racial, religious, sexual orientation or disability element in any offence from the point of reporting, through investigation and up to prosecution.

When an incident or crime has been reported to police by the victim or any other person that they perceive as being motivated by prejudice or hate, it will always be recorded and investigated as a hate incident or crime in accordance with the PSNI Hate Crime Policy.

It is therefore not appropriate to seek to evaluate an individual's perception; to do so would undermine the basis on which this definition has been adopted by Criminal Justice Agencies.

Separated Prisoners

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 689/11, why 4 of the 21 separated prisoners did not sign a compact which was instead endorsed by the Prison Governor; and whether this is classed as a sufficient acceptance of the terms of the compact by these 4 prisoners.

(AQW 1015/11)

Minister of Justice: All prisoners who apply for entry into separated accommodation are provided with a copy of the Compact at the point of application and a Prison Governor will explain to them that the terms of the Compact, Prison Rules and the rule of law will apply. Every applicant must sign the application form and in the small minority of cases where the Compact itself has not been signed, the Northern Ireland Prison Service is satisfied that the prisoner has been made fully aware of the terms of compact.

The Northern Ireland Prison Service is satisfied that this process, which is always witnessed by an additional officer, demonstrates sufficient acceptance of the terms of the Compact.

Prisoners Released Accidentally

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Justice how many prisoners have been accidentally released in each of the last six years.

(AQW 1019/11)

Minister of Justice: I am advised that the Northern Ireland Prison Service has no record of any prisoner being accidentally released in the last six years other than the two cases reported in the last week – Devidas Paliutis from Maghaberry and Connelly James Cummins from Downpatrick Crown Court.

Neighbourhood Renewal

Ms J McCann asked the Minister of Justice to detail the services currently funded, fully or partly, by his Department under Neighbourhood Renewal in the West Belfast constituency.

(AQW 1073/11)

Minister of Justice: The Department of Justice does not fund any services under Neighbourhood Renewal.

Custody Suites

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to detail the (i) number; and (ii) location of existing custody suites, broken down by policing district.

(AQW 1120/11)

Minister of Justice: Issues pertaining to the number and location of PSNI custody suites are matters for the Chief Constable, who is accountable to the Northern Ireland Policing Board. I am committed to respecting the operational independence of the Chief Constable and the role of the Policing Board.

You may therefore wish to direct your question to the PSNI.

Department for Regional Development

NI Water

Mr G Savage asked the Minister for Regional Development if NI Water will only accept bids from suppliers whose staff are direct employees of the tendering company and that no bids will be accepted from suppliers who employ agency staff.

(AQW 649/11)

Minister for Regional Development (Mr C Murphy): I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that it will accept tender bids from any supplier that meets the requirements of a particular tender, regardless of how its staff are provided.

NI Water

Mr G Savage asked the Minister for Regional Development what NI Water's contingency plan is should (i) no company or supplier submit a bid for NI Water Tender C398 - Provision of Technical Support Staff in the Area of Mechanical and Engineering Services; and (ii) none of the bids submitted for this tender comply with the tender specifications.

(AQW 651/11)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that it is considered inappropriate to disclose details of any contingency plan associated with either (i) or (ii) above as this is deemed commercially sensitive information and disclosure would be likely to impact upon both the ongoing tender process associated with C398 and upon the implementation of any such contingency plan.

NI Water

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he, or his special adviser, have received requests for a meeting from any of the dismissed non-executive directors of NI Water; and what responses have been given.

(AQW 662/11)

Minister for Regional Development: One of the former non-executive directors wrote to me on two occasions requesting meetings to discuss the circumstances surrounding his departure from the Board of NI Water. I declined both requests.

The Blue Badge Scheme

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the number of (i) successful; and (ii) unsuccessful applications for the Blue Badge Scheme in the North Down constituency, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 684/11)

Minister for Regional Development: I can advise that the database maintained by the Blue Badge Unit within my Department's Roads Service, does not store information on the number of Blue Badges issued on a constituency basis. Although the database is able to provide details of Blue Badges issued within the North Down area by postcode, the system does not have the facility to report on the number of Blue Badges issued by postcode in any given year. However, it is able to provide the number of current valid Blue Badges issued within the North Down area by postcode and this information is detailed in the table below.

Postcode	Individual	Support Organisation
BT16	982	74
BT18	775	4
BT19	2,267	6
BT20	1,616	11
BT21	590	0
BT22	1,605	7
BT23	3,112	1

With regard to successful and unsuccessful applications, unfortunately the database only holds this information, for the whole of the North, for the last three years. The available information is detailed below:

Financial Year	Valid applications	Successful	Unsuccessful
2007/2008	32,557	31,802	755
2008/2009	35,190	34,353	837
2009/2010	35,663	34,610	1,053

Larne to Craigyhill Bus Route

Mr A Ross asked the Minister for Regional Development how many passengers used the Larne to Craigyhill bus route in each of the last 24 months.

(AQW 687/11)

Minister for Regional Development: I am unable to provide the information in the format requested as Translink records the number of passenger journeys rather than the actual number of passengers. The information provided to me by Translink is set out in the table below.

AUGUST 2008 - AUGUST 2010

Year	Month	Passenger Journeys
2008	August	14093
	September	16831
	October	16605
	November	15523
	December	14864
2009	January	13257
	February	13009
	March	15690
	April	13925
	May	13564
	June	13575
	July	12191
	August	12624
	September	14090
	October	13425
	November	12255
	December	12251
2010	January	12065
	February	10821
	March	13957
	April	11462
	May	11785

Year	Month	Passenger Journeys
2010	June	13244
	July	10373
	August	11349

Uniformity of Speed Limits

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Regional Development what consideration he has given to introducing speed limits in kilometres per hour to ensure uniformity across the island of Ireland.
(AQW 746/11)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has no plans to introduce road signs displaying distances in kilometres.

The legislative position with regard to the metrication of road signs is articulated within 'The Units of Measurement Regulations 1995', which state that miles, yards and feet should be used for road traffic signs, distance and speed measurement.

In addition, I should advise that the Northern Ireland Act 1998, 'Units of Measurement and United Kingdom Primary Standards' are reserved matters and can therefore only be devolved with the consent of the Secretary of State.

I am further advised that the conversion from miles to kilometres of all road signs in the North would incur a significant capital cost, as all existing signs would need to be retrofitted or replaced. These costs would be disproportionate to any overall benefit derived from the change and, given the current budgetary pressures on the Department, would be difficult to justify.

Blue and Orange Badge Holders

Mr D Kinahan asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans he has to re-examine the six months processing period that blue and orange badge holders have to wait before obtaining a designated parking bay.
(AQW 760/11)

Minister for Regional Development: I should firstly explain that the Blue Badge Scheme was introduced on 1 April 2000 to replace the orange badges and that the latter ceased to be valid with effect from 1 April 2003.

Disabled parking bays are authorised by means of a statutory rule (SR). Normally, successful applications from 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 proposal with the Regional Development Committee and publishing a notice of the Department's intention to make the SR in the local press. My Department is then required to wait for a period of 22 days from the date of publication of the notice, to give interested parties an opportunity to object, or make representations. If no objections are received, the Department is then in a position to make the SR. If objections are received, my Department must consider the objections and this can add considerably to the processing time.

I can further advise that until recently, the process had included clearing the draft SR with the Department of Finance and Personnel's Departmental Solicitor's Office (DSO). However, over the past 12 months, problems arose in getting the draft SRs cleared by the DSO and this added significantly to the overall processing time. To counteract this, new procedures were introduced in June of this year so that SRs of this type no longer need to be referred to the DSO. This action should help to speed up the processing time, therefore I do not intend to further re-examine the procedures at this time.

Uniformity of Speed Limits

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister for Regional Development if he has any plans to introduce speed limits in kilometres per hour to ensure uniformity with traffic controls in the Republic of Ireland and other EU countries.

(AQW 789/11)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has no plans to introduce road signs displaying distances in kilometres.

The legislative position with regard to the metrication of road signs is articulated within 'The Units of Measurement Regulations 1995', which state that miles, yards and feet should be used for road traffic signs, distance and speed measurement.

In addition, I should advise that the Northern Ireland Act 1998, 'Units of Measurement and United Kingdom Primary Standards' are reserved matters and can therefore only be devolved with the consent of the Secretary of State.

I am further advised that the conversion from miles to kilometres of all road signs in the North would incur a significant capital cost, as all existing signs would need to be retrofitted or replaced. These costs would be disproportionate to any overall benefit derived from the change and, given the current budgetary pressures on the Department, would be difficult to justify.

School Signs

Mr T Lunn asked the Minister for Regional Development under what circumstances a school can erect a sign for its school on a public highway.

(AQW 819/11)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that there are two types of traffic signs that can be used for schools, namely warning signs and direction signs.

Warning signs, which show children inside a red triangle, are used on the approaches to schools to warn of the likelihood of encountering children in the road ahead. Roads Service normally provides these signs at schools on request.

Direction signs are used to locate destinations on the road network. Again, these signs are requested by the school and Roads Service would consider a number of issues when assessing such requests.

I am advised that direction signing will not normally be permitted to any premises located on urban distributor roads or on rural A or B class roads, as these buildings will generally be easy to locate. However, any school may be signed where there is a clear road safety need or where Roads Service is satisfied that there is an obvious difficulty in finding the school due to its location or remoteness from the main road network. In addition, should such a school be regularly made available to the wider community for purposes beyond normal school usage, this factor will also be taken into consideration.

Where approval for this type of sign is given, Roads Service would normally arrange for the design and erection of the signing, with the cost being recovered from the school.

Railway Bridges

Mr T Burns asked the Minister for Regional Development, following the collapse of the Malahide railway viaduct, to detail (i) how many railway bridges had checks carried out; (ii) which railway bridges were checked; (iii) what repairs were carried out as a result of any checks; and (iv) the cost of any checks or repairs.

(AQW 821/11)

Minister for Regional Development:

- (i) Translink advise that 157 rail bridges on the NIR network were involved in a desk study following the collapse of the Malahide railway viaduct. Of these, 39 major structures had received

underwater inspections by external specialists during the summer of 2008 prior to the Malahide incident and twenty-five other structures had previously been inspected and repair works identified. Seventy-two minor structures had inspections completed by NIR. Twenty-one inspections for scour were not required (as the bridges spanned minor water courses only).

(ii) The table below details all the bridges that were checked:

Nr	Bridge Type	Location	Bridge Over	Nr of Spans
1	UB	Border to Meigh	Stream	1
2	C	Border to Meigh	Stream	1
3	UB	Meigh to Newry	River	1
4	C	Meigh to Newry	Stream	1
5	UB	Newry to Knockarney	Land & Stream	18
6	UB	Newry to Knockarney	Stream	1
7	UB	Newry to Knockarney	Stream	1
8	UB	Knockarney to Poyntzpass	Canal & Accom. Road	1
9	UB	Knockarney to Poyntzpass	River	1
10	UB	Knockarney to Poyntzpass	Stream	1
11	UB	Knockarney to Poyntzpass	Canal & Public Road	1
12	UB	Poyntzpass	Stream	3
13	UB	Poyntzpass to Scarva	Stream	2
14	UB	Poyntzpass to Scarva	Stream	1
15	UB	Scarva to Portadown	Stream	1
16	UB	Scarva to Portadown	Stream	2
17	UB	Scarva to Portadown	River	5
18	UB	Scarva to Portadown	River	2
19	UB	Scarva to Portadown	River	1
20	UB	Portadown to Lurgan	River	3
21	UB	Portadown to Lurgan	Water Channel	1
22	UB	Bell's Row to Drumbane	Stream	1
23	UB	Bell's Row to Drumbane	Stream	1
24	UB	Drumbane to Moira	Lagan Navigational Canal	1
25	UB	Moira to Trummery	Culvert Canal Feeder	1
26	UB	Moira to Trummery	Culvert Canal Feeder	1
27	UB	Damhead to Maze	Farm track & culvert	1
28	UB	Damhead to Maze	Stream	1
29	UB	Lissie to Knockmore	Stream	1
30	UB	Derriaghy to Dunmurry	River	1

Nr	Bridge Type	Location	Bridge Over	Nr of Spans
31	UB	Derriaghy to Dunmurry	River	1
32	UB	Belfast Central to Lagan Jct.	River	5
33	UB	Dargan Viaduct	River and Public Roads	3
34	UB	Dargan Viaduct	River and Public Roads	3
35	UB	Victoria Park to Sydenham	River	5
36	UB	Sydenham to Holywood	Tidal Stream	1
37	UB	Craigavad to Rockport	Stream	1
38	UB	Craigavad to Seahill	Stream	1
39	C	Seahill to Helen's Bay	Stream	1
40	UB	Helen's Bay to Crawfordsburn	Stream	1
41	UB	Helen's Bay to Crawfordsburn	Valley & Stream	5
42	UB	Bangor West to Bangor	Stream	1
43	UB	York Rd. to Whiteabbey	Stream	2
44	UB	York Rd. to Whiteabbey	Stream & Public Road	2
45	UB	Whiteabbey to Bleach Green	Stream	1
46	UB	Bleach Green Junction	Watercourse	1
47	UB	Bleach Green Jct. to Monkstown	River Valley, Larne Line	13
48	UB	Monkstown to Kingsbog Crossing	Watercourse	1
49	UB	Monkstown to Kingsbog Crossing	Stream	1
50	UB	Monkstown to Kingsbog Crossing	Stream	1
51	UB	Monkstown to Kingsbog Crossing	Stream	1
52	UB	Monkstown to Kingsbog Crossing	Stream	1
53	UB	Kingsbog Crossing to Doagh	Stream	1
54	UB	Kingsbog Crossing to Doagh	Stream	1
55	UB	Kingsbog Crossing to Doagh	Stream	1
56	UB	Doagh to Ballymartin	Stream	1

Nr	Bridge Type	Location	Bridge Over	Nr of Spans
57	UB	Doagh to Ballymartin	Stream	1
58	UB	Doagh to Ballymartin	Stream	1
59	UB	Ballymartin to Templepatrick	River	1
60	UB	Kilmakee to Muckamore	Public Road & River	4
61	UB	Kilmakee to Muckamore	Stream	1
62	UB	Kilmakee to Muckamore	Stream	1
63	UB	Bleach Green to Jordanstown	River	2
64	UB	Bleach Green to Jordanstown	River Valley	7
65	UB	Trooperslane to Clipperstown	Stream	1
66	UB	Trooperslane to Clipperstown	River	2
67	UB	Carrickfergus to Downshire	Stream	1
68	UB	Carrickfergus to Downshire	Stream	1
69	UB	Downshire to Kilroot	Stream & Footpath	1
70	UB	Downshire to Kilroot	Stream	1
71	UB	Downshire to Kilroot	Stream	1
72	UB	Downshire to Kilroot	River	3
73	UB	Ballycarry to Magheramorne	Tidal Watercourse	1
74	UB	Magheramorne to Glynn	Stream	1
75	UB	Glynn	River	3
76	UB	Glynn to Larne	Stream	1
77	UB	Glynn to Larne	Tidal Watercourse	1
78	UB	Glynn to Larne	River	1
79	C	Larne to Larne Harbour	Culvert	2
80	UB	Antrim to Springfarm	Stream	1
81	UB	Niblock to Carngranny	Stream	1
82	UB	Niblock to Carngranny	Stream	1
83	UB	Carngranny to Kellswater	Stream	2
84	UB	Carngranny to Kellswater	Stream	1

85	UB	Carngranny to Kellswater	Stream	1
86	UB	Carngranny to Kellswater	Stream	1
87	UB	Kellswater North to Slaght	River	5
88	UB	Kellswater North to Slaght	Field Access/Stream	2
89	UB	Kellswater North to Slaght	Stream	1
90	UB	Slaght to Ballymena	Accommodation Road/ Stream	1
91	UB	Slaght to Ballymena	Deerfin Burn	1
92	UB	Slaght to Ballymena	Public Road & River	4
93	UB	Slaght to Ballymena	Stream	1
94	UB	Ballymena to Cullybackey	Stream	1
95	UB	Broughdone to Glarryford	Stream	1
96	UB	Broughdone to Glarryford	Stream	1
97	UB	Broughdone to Glarryford	River	4
98	UB	Glarryford to Killagan	Stream	1
99	UB	Killagan to Dunloy	Stream	1
100	UB	Killagan to Dunloy	Stream	1
101	C	Dunloy to Galdanagh	Stream	1
102	C	Galdanagh	Stream	1
103	UB	Galdanagh to Ballyboyland	Stream	1
104	UB	Galdanagh to Ballyboyland	Stream	1
105	UB	Galdanagh to Ballyboyland	Stream	1
106	UB	Galdanagh to Ballyboyland	Stream	1
107	UB	Galdanagh to Ballyboyland	Stream	1
108	UB	Galdanagh to Ballyboyland	Stream	1
109	UB	Galdanagh to Ballyboyland	River	1
110	UB	Ballyboyland to Ballymone	River	1
111	UB	Ballyboyland to Ballymoney	Stream	1
112	UB	Ballyboyland to Ballymoney	Stream	1
113	UB	Ballyboyland to Ballymoney	River	1
114	UB	Ballymoney to Coldagh	Stream	2
115	UB	Ballymoney to Coldagh	Stream	2
116	UB	Damhead to Coleraine	Stream	1
117	UB	Damhead to Coleraine	Stream	1

118	UB	Damhead to Coleraine	Stream	1
119	UB	Coleraine	Stream	1
120	UB	University to Cromore	Stream	1
121	UB	University to Cromore	Stream	1
122	UB	Cromore to Dhu Varren	Stream	1
123	UB	Dhu Varren to Portrush	Stream	1
124	UB	Coleraine to Castlerock	River	10
125	UB	Coleraine to Castlerock	River	3
126	UB	Coleraine to Castlerock	Stream	1
127	UB	Castlerock to Downhill	Stream & Road	3
128	UB	Downhill to Umbra	Stream	1
129	UB	Downhill to Umbra	Stream	1
130	UB	Umbra to Magilligan	Stream	3
131	C	Umbra to Magilligan	Stream	1
132	C	Umbra to Magilligan	Stream	1
133	UB	Umbra to Magilligan	Stream	1
134	UB	Umbra to Magilligan	Stream	1
135	UB	Bellarena to Carrowreagh	River	15
136	UB	Limavady Junct. to Ballykelly	River & Canal	4
137	UB	Limavady Junct. to Ballykelly	Stream	1
138	UB	Ballykelly to Eglington	River	1
139	UB	Ballykelly to Eglington	Stream	1
140	UB	Ballykelly to Eglington	Stream	1
141	UB	Ballykelly to Eglington	Stream	1
142	UB	Ballykelly to Eglington	Stream	1
143	UB	Ballykelly to Eglington	Stream	2
144	UB	Eglington to Lisahally	River	11
145	UB	Knockmore to Ballinderry	Stream	1
146	UB	Knockmore to Ballinderry	Stream	1
147	UB	Knockmore to Ballinderry	Stream	1
148	UB	Knockmore to Ballinderry	Public Road & River	1
149	UB	Ballinderry to Glenavy	Stream	1
150	UB	Ballinderry to Glenavy	Stream	1
151	UB	Glenavy to Crumlin	River	1

152	UB	Crumlin to Antrim	Public Road & River	1
153	UB	Crumlin to Antrim	Stream	1
154	UB	Crumlin to Antrim	River	1
155	UB	Crumlin to Antrim	River & Canal	2
156	UB	Crumlin to Antrim	Stream	1
157	UB	Bleach Green Jct. to Monkstown	Stream	1

Note:

UB represents under-bridge

C represents culvert

- (iii) A range of minor remedial measures were completed ranging from scour protection to in situ concrete bagging.
- (iv) Checks and repairs following the Malahide incident cost approximately £15,000 for inspections and approximately £110,000 for repair works.

Surplus Land

Dr A McDonnell asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail any (i) land; and (ii) property owned by his Department which is currently deemed surplus to requirements, including the location of the land or property and any plans for its disposal.

(AQW 832/11)

Minister for Regional Development: The following table sets out the relevant land and property details for my Department.

Roads Service Division	House No	Street	Town	Property Description
Eastern	29	Ardmore Park	Belfast	Land
Eastern	31	Ardmore Park	Belfast	Land
Eastern	33	Ardmore Park	Belfast	Land
Eastern	7	Humber Street	Belfast	Land
Eastern	1	Redburn Square	Holywood	Land
Eastern	322	Comber Road - Carr	Lisburn	Land
Eastern	4	Fulmar Avenue (Prince William Road)	Lisburn	Land
Eastern	6	Fulmar Avenue	Lisburn	Land
Eastern	2	Fulmar Avenue	Lisburn	Land
Eastern	12	Fulmar Avenue	Lisburn	Land
Eastern	25 - 35	Thornleigh Drive / Prince William Road	Lisburn	Land
Eastern		M1 Motorway	Moir	Land
Eastern		Ballynahinch Road	Lisburn	Land

Roads Service Division	House No	Street	Town	Property Description
Eastern	1	Redburn Square	Holywood	Land
Eastern		M2 Motorway	Belfast	Land
Eastern	3	Belfast Road	Ballynure	Property
Eastern	9	Belfast Road	Ballynure	Property
Eastern	11	Belfast Road	Ballynure	Property
Eastern	87	Abbey Park	Belfast	Property
Eastern	17	Barnetts Crescent	Belfast	Property
Eastern	21	Barnetts Road	Belfast	Property
Eastern	1	Kenbella Parade	Belfast	Property
Eastern	271	Shore Road	Belfast	Property
Eastern	147	Manse Road	Newtownabbey	Land
Eastern	208	Bangor Road	Holywood	Property
Eastern	211	Shore Road	Newtownabbey	Property
Eastern	72	Kingsdale Park	Dundonald, Co Down	Property
Eastern	43-65	Belfast Road	Holywood	Land
Eastern		Prince William Road	Lisburn	Land
Eastern		The Crescent	Holywood	Land
Eastern	34	Carnreagh	Hillsborough	Land
Eastern		Moir Road/ Old Road	Lisburn	Land
Eastern		Dunlady Road/Dunlady Manor	Belfast	Land
Eastern		Beverley Road	Newtownabbey	Land
Eastern		Fairhill Cres & Ballyduff Road	Newtownabbey	Land
Eastern		Prince William Road	Lisburn	Land
Eastern		Glenavy Road - Lay-By(Route A26)	Lisburn	Land
Eastern		Blanchflower Park	Belfast	Land
Eastern		Lurgan Road / Chapel Road	Glenavy	Land
Eastern		Moir Rd/ Furze Road	Glenavy	Land
Eastern	155	Ballynahinch Road	Lisburn	Land
Eastern		Holywood Road	Belfast	Land
Eastern		Scrabo Street	Belfast	Land
Eastern		Fortwilliam Interchange M2 (Sth)	Belfast	Land
Eastern		Queens Road / New Street	Lisburn	Land

Roads Service Division	House No	Street	Town	Property Description
Eastern		Sprucefield Roundabout	Lisburn	Land
Eastern		A2 Dual Carraigeway	Hollywood	Land
Eastern		M1 / Stockmans Way	Belfast	Land
Eastern		Stewartstown Road	Belfast	Land
Eastern		Queens Road / Seymour Street	Lisburn	Land
Eastern		Bentrim Road	Lisburn	Land
Eastern		Old Coach Lane / Upper Malone Road	Belfast	Land
Eastern	4	Grahamsbridge Road	Dundonald	Land
Eastern		Nelson Street / Little Patrick Street	Belfast	Land
Eastern		A8 (M)	Glengormley	Land
Eastern	297	Whitewell Road	Belfast	Land
Eastern	16	Berkley Road/Beechill Road	Castlereagh	Land
Eastern	132	Ravenswood Park	Belfast	Land
Eastern		Flush Road	Belfast	Land
Eastern		Lower Newtownards Road	Belfast	Land
Eastern		Parkway / Belmont Road	Belfast	Land
Eastern		Stewartstown Road/ Linden Hill	Belfast	Land
Eastern		Argyle Street	Belfast	Land
Eastern	278	Comber Road	Belfast	Land
Eastern	276A	Comber Road	Belfast	Land
Eastern		Castle Gardens - Queens Road Car Park	Lisburn	Land
Eastern	183	Saintfield Road	Belfast	Land
Eastern		Lands Adjacent To M1 At Dunmurry	Dunmurry	Land
Eastern		Linenhall Street	Lisburn	Land
Eastern	87-89	Old Hollywood Road	Belfast	Land
Eastern		Plantation Ave/Saintfield Road	Lisburn	Land
Eastern		Old Larne Road (Land Adjacent To No.10)	Ballynure	Land
Eastern		Lands At Macedon/Hazelbank Roundabout		Land
Eastern	265	Old Belfast Road	Bangor	Land
Eastern		Gransha Road	Bangor	Land

Roads Service Division	House No	Street	Town	Property Description
Eastern		Millbrook Road	Lisburn	Land
Eastern	188-190	Andersonstown Road	Belfast	Land
Eastern	130	Dromore Road	Hillsborough	Property
Eastern	61	Ballymacconnell Road	Bangor	Land
Eastern	1&7 & 159/163	Humber Street & Dee Street	Belfast	
Eastern	5	Ferndale Avenue	Lisburn	Land
Eastern		Land At Rear Of Collinbridge Close & Ct And M2	Glengormley	Land
Eastern	131	Ballynahinch Road	Lisburn	Land
Eastern		Station Road	Newtownabbey	Land
Eastern	68	Lower Braniel Road	Belfast	Land
Eastern	108	Halftown Road	Lisburn	Dwelling - Occupied
Eastern		Manse Road / Prince Charles Way Junction	Newtownabbey	Land
Eastern	519-529	Ormeau Road (Rosetta Cottages)	Belfast	Property
Eastern	2	Green Lane	Conlig	Land
Eastern	49	Bangor Road	Conlig	Land
Eastern		Hill Street	Lisburn	Land
Eastern	238	Stewartstown Road	Belfast	Land
Eastern	25A	Millvale Road	Hillsborough	Land
Eastern		Donegall Quay & Anne Street	Belfast	Land
Eastern		Upper Dunmurry Lane	Dunmurry	Land
Eastern		Whitla Street / York Street	Belfast	Land
Eastern	9	Strathallan Park	Belfast	Land
Eastern	15	Scrabo Street	Belfast	Land
Eastern	2	Ravenscroft Avenue	Belfast	Land
Eastern		Six Road Ends, Upper Gransha Road	Bangor	Land
Eastern	ADJACENT TO 32	Farmley Road	Glengormley	Land
Eastern	9C	Thornleigh Park	Belfast	Land
Eastern		189 Carnmoney Road Side And Rear Of	Newtownabbey	Land
Eastern	25	Glebe Road East	Newtownabbey	Land

Roads Service Division	House No	Street	Town	Property Description
Eastern		Ballynahinch/Howe/ Magheraconluce Road	Lisburn	Land
Eastern	92	Taylor's Avenue	Carrickfergus	Land
Eastern	24	Bernice Road	Newtownabbey	Land
Eastern	12	Old Carrick Road	Newtownabbey	Land
Eastern		Seymour Street / Queens Road	Lisburn	Land
Eastern		Mayfield Link	Mallusk	Land
Eastern		Hamiltons Road	Bangor	Land
Eastern	81	High Street	Holywood	Land
Eastern	14	Ballylenaghan Road	Belfast	Land
Eastern	93	Old Holywood Road	Belfast	Land
Eastern	20A	Ballycraig Road	Newtownabbey	Land
Eastern	11	Glebe Gardens	Newtownabbey	Land
Eastern	91	Old Holywood Road	Belfast	Land
Eastern	88	Shore Road	Greenisland	Property
Eastern	1A	Station Road	Greenisland	Property
Eastern	27	Viewfort Park	Belfast	Land
Eastern		Distillery Street/Westlink	Belfast	Land
Eastern	5	Station Road	Lisburn	Land
Eastern	26	Church Hill	Lisburn	Land
Eastern	6	Upper Road	Carrickfergus	Land
Eastern		Kilwarlin Road/M1	Hillsborough	Land
Eastern	49	Belfast Road	Holywood	Land
Eastern		Glenmachan Place		Land
Eastern	48	Upper Road	Greenisland	Land
Eastern		Belmont Park	Parkway	Land
Eastern		Church Road	Moneyreagh	Land
Eastern		Car Park At Giants Ring / Ballynahatty Road	Belfast	Land
Eastern	88	Shore Road	Greenisland	Property
Eastern		Old Golf Course Road	Dunmurry	Land
Eastern	167	Finaghy Road South	Belfast	Land
Eastern	17	Seahill Drive	Holywood	Land
Eastern	67	Schomberg Avenue	Belfast	Land

Roads Service Division	House No	Street	Town	Property Description
Eastern	3	Ferndale Avenue	Lisburn	Property
Eastern	7	Ferndale Avenue	Lisburn	Land
Eastern	11	Ferndale Avenue	Lisburn	Land
Eastern		Madison Avenue East	Belfast	Land
Eastern	7	Strathallan Park	Belfast	Land
Eastern		Victoria Street Road Service Depot	Carrickfergus	
Eastern	100	High Street	Belfast	Land
Eastern		Westminster Avenue	Belfast	Land
Eastern		Frederick Street	Belfast	Land
Eastern	55 & 57	Great Patrick Street	Belfast	Land
Eastern		Linenhall Street	Lisburn	Land
Eastern	57	Ballymacconnell Road	Bangor	Land
Eastern	57A	Ballymacconnell Road	Bangor	Land
Eastern	28	William Alexander Park	Belfast	Land
Eastern		Shore Road/Skegoneill Avenue	Belfast	Land
Eastern	5	Belfast Road	Glenavy	Land
Northern	12	Carnview Park	Ballymena	Land
Northern	112	Toberdoney Road	Dervock	Land
Northern	27	Browning Drive	Derry	Land
Northern	29	Browning Drive	Derry	Land
Northern	26	Browning Drive	Derry	Land
Northern	31	Caw Park	Derry	Land
Northern	24	Browning Drive	Derry	Land
Northern		Glenshane Road	Derry	Land
Northern		Cumber Road	Claudy	Land
Northern		Lisnevenagh Road	Ballymena	Land
Northern		Airport Road	Muckamore	Land
Northern		Airport Road	Muckamore	Land
Northern		Tully Road	Crumlin	Land
Northern		Tully Road	Crumlin	Land
Northern		Tully Road	Nutts Corner	Land
Northern	39	Carnanreagh Road Park	Claudy	Land
Northern		Cromkill Road	Ballymena	Land

Roads Service Division	House No	Street	Town	Property Description
Northern		Castle Road	Randalstown	Land
Northern	16	Ballybeg Road	Ahoghill	Vacant Commercial Property And Land
Northern		Glenshane Road	Dungiven	Land
Northern	2	Ballystrudder Road	Ballystrudder	Land
Northern	3	The Poplars	Randalstown	Land
Northern		Sea Road	Castlerock	Land
Northern		Lower Main Street	Limavady	Land
Northern		Mill Road	Portstewart	Land
Northern		Airfield Road	Eglinton	Land And Roadbed
Northern		Valley Road	Ballymena	Land
Northern	1	High Road	Portstewart	Land
Northern		Castleway	Antrim	Land
Northern		Lisnevenagh Road	Ballymena	Land
Northern	81	Ballymoney Road	Ballymena	Land
Northern		Macfin	Ballymoney	Land
Northern		Mill Path	Eglinton	Land
Northern	21	Deanfield	Derry	Land
Northern	52	Movilla Road	Portstewart	Land
Northern		Railway Street	Ballymena	Land
Northern	68	Culmore Road	Derry	Land
Northern		Castle Road	Randalstown	Land
Northern		Holly Bank Road	Ballyclare	Land
Northern		Fry's Road	Ballymena	Land
Northern		Point Road	Magillgan	Land
Northern		Oldpark Road	Ballymena	Land
Northern		High Street	Portstewart	Land
Northern		Carniny Road	Ballymena	Land
Northern	90	Carniny Road	Ballymena	Land
Northern	101	Largy Road	Portglenone	Land
Northern		Bush Road	Antrim	Land
Northern		Plot 1 Fairhill Car Park	Larne	Land

Roads Service Division	House No	Street	Town	Property Description
Northern		Hollybank Road	Ballyclare	Land
Northern		Limavady Bypass	Limavady	Land
Northern	ADJACENT TO 33	Belfast Road	Larne	Land
Northern		Main Street	Ahoghill	Land
Northern		Mount Street/Thomas Street	Ballymena	Land
Northern		Bonds Hill	Derry	Land
Northern		Greenan Road	Randalstown	Land
Northern		Vow Road	Ballymoney	Land
Northern		Greenan Road	Derry	Land
Northern	81	Lisnevenagh Road	Ballymena	Land
Northern	39	Collinwood	Ballymena	Land
Northern		Victoria Market (8 Strand Road)	Derry	Land
Northern		Old School Lane	Derry	Land
Northern		Moir Road	Crumlin	Land
Northern	95	Macfin Road	Ballymoney	Land
Northern	16	Moneybrannon Road	Aghadowey	Land
Northern		Kirk Road	Ballymoney	Land
Northern	71	Doury Road	Ballymena	Land
Northern		Oldstone Road	Muckamore	Land
Northern		Bush Road	Antrim	Land
Northern		Culmore Road	Derry	Land
Northern	8	Blighs Lane	Derry	Land
Northern		Carmavy Road	Antrim	Land
Northern		Toome By-Pass	Ballymena	Land
Northern	40	Bush Road	Bushmills	Land
Northern		Tully Road	Antrim Eastern By-Pass	Land
Northern		Drumcroone Road	Coleraine	Land
Northern	74	Carhill Road	Garvagh	Land
Northern		Ballymoney By-Pass	Ballymoney	Land
Northern		Frys Hollow	Ballymena	Land
Northern	181	Airport Road	Antrim	Land
Northern	7-11	Lough Road	Antrim	Land

Roads Service Division	House No	Street	Town	Property Description
Northern	51/53	Queen Street	Ballymoney	Land
Northern		Victoria Road	Derry	Land
Northern	412	Ballyquin Road	Limavady	Land
Northern	38	Chapel Road	Dungiven	Land
Northern		Ballyrobin Road	Antrim	Land
Northern		Lisnagrot	Kilrea	Land
Northern	1A	Taylor Park	Limavady	Land
Northern		Frys Road	Ballymena	Land
Northern	2	Norburgh Park	Derry	Land
Northern	119	Old Tullygarley Road	Ballymena	Land
Northern		Foreglen Road	Derry	Land
Northern	36	Chapel Road	Dungiven	Land
Northern	34	Chapel Road	Dungiven	Land
Northern		Fairhill Car Park Plot 2	Larne	Land
Northern		Plot 3 Fairhill Car Park	Larne	Land
Northern	126 - 130	Craigmore Road	Ringsend	Land
Northern	126	Craigmore Road	Ringsend	Land
Northern		Craigmore	Ringsend	Land
Northern		Craigmore	Ringsend	Land
Northern		Craigmore	Ringsend	Land
Northern	8	Blighs Lane	Derry	Land
Northern		Drumagrove Road	Clough	Land
Northern	89	Drumcroon Road	Coleraine	Land
Northern		Drumcroon Road	Coleraine	Land
Northern	49	Brough Road	Castledawson	Dwelling - Vacant
Northern		Drumcroon Road	Coleraine	Land
Northern		Woodside Road	Ballymena	Land
Northern		Foyle Drive	Ballykelly	Land
Northern	41	Galgorm Road	Ballymena	Land
Western	20	Lettice Street	Aughnacloy	Land
Western	2A	Mill Street	Aughnacloy	Land
Western	346 I	Boa Island Road	Belleek	Land
Western	4B	Westland Road South	Cookstown	Land

Roads Service Division	House No	Street	Town	Property Description
Western	184A	Tamnamore Road	Dungannon	Land
Western	3A	Clabby Road	Fivemiletown	Land
Western	515	Killadeas Road	Kesh	Land
Western	111	Manoo Road	Kesh	Land
Western	3	Snowhill Road	Lisbellaw	Land
Western	74	Killyclogher Road	Omagh	Land
Western	1A	Sperrin Park	Omagh	Land
Western	51A	Dock Street	Strabane	Land (Contained Within Carpark)
Western	22A	The Square	Stewartstown	Land
Western	31C	Killyclogher Road	Omagh	Land
Western	54A	Market Street	Omagh	Land
Western	2	Sperrin Park	Omagh	Land
Western	5	Sperrin Park	Omagh	Land
Western	22 Plot C	Deverney Road	Omagh	Land
Western	81	Galbally Road	Dromore	Land Used As Screening Depot
Western	9A	Tobermore Road	Draperstown	Land
Western	1A	King Street	Magherafelt	Land
Western	187A	Tamnamore Road	Dungannon	Land
Western	187B	Tamnamore Road	Dungannon	Land
Western	187C	Tamnamore Road	Dungannon	Land
Western	187D	Tamnamore Road	Dungannon	Land
Western	191	Tamnamore Road	Dungannon	Land
Western	191A	Tamnamore Road	Dungannon	Land
Western	Adjacent To 5 Plot C1	Caledon Road	Aughnacloy	Land
Western	184	Tamnamore Road Mullenakill South / Derryhubbert North Dungannon	Dungannon	Land
Western	14C	Ballintarson Lane	Lisbellaw	Land
Western	346 J	Boa Island Road	Belleek	Land

Roads Service Division	House No	Street	Town	Property Description
Western	435A	Boa Island Road	Belleek	Land
Western	3C	Coolebrooke Park Road	Brookeborough	Land
Western	Plot 1	Mill Street	Irvinestown	Land
Western	28D	Mill Street	Irvinestown	Land
Western	136	C452 Drumeer Road	Maguiresbridge	Land
Western	Plot 1 & 2	Derryardy Lane	Dungannon	Land
Western	14A	Dungannon Road	Aughnacloy	Land
Western	3A	Coolebrooke Park Road	Brookeborough	Land
Western	Plot C2	Caledon Road	Aughnacloy	Land
Western	12A	Dungannon Road	Aughnacloy	Land
Western	10A	Dungannon Road	Aughnacloy	Land
Western		Clabby Road	Fivemiletown	Land
Western	1A	Dunnabraggy Road	Money more	Land
Western	70	Killymeal Road	Dungannon	Land
Western	36	Trewmount Road	Killyman	Land
Western		Tempo Road	Enniskillen	Land
Western	14A	Motalee Road	Magherafelt	Land
Western	21B	Moneysallin Road	Kilrea	Land
Western		Bradley Way	Strabane	Land
Western	Fair Green	Camderry Road Car Park	Dromore	Carpark
Western		Edfield Way Car Park	Fivemiletown	Land Within Carpark
Western	50	Augher Road	Clogher	Land
Western	Plot2&3	Mill Street	Irvinestown	Land
Western	29	Orritor Road	Cookstown	Land - Part Of Car Park
Western	A29	Station Road	Money more	Land
Western	Plot3&4	Draperstown Road	Desertmartin	Land
Western	11	Mullaghdu n Lane	Dungannon	Land
Western		Mountstewart Road	Fintona	Land
Western		Racolpa Road	Omagh	Land
Western		Tempo Road	Enniskillen	Land
Western	19A	Desertmartin Road	Tobermore	Land
Western	19A	Desertmartin Road	Tobermore	Land

Roads Service Division	House No	Street	Town	Property Description
Western	19A	Desertmartin Road	Tobermore	Land
Western	19A	Desertmartin Road	Tobermore	Land
Western		Desertmartin Road	Moneymore	Land
Western	Adjacent To 30	Clanabogan Road	Omagh	Land
Western		65 Westland Road	Cookstown	Land
Western	Adjacent To 45	Old Rossory Road	Enniskillen	Land
Western		Tummery Road	Dromore	Land
Western	30	Johnston Park	Omagh	Land
Western	25	Enniskillen Road	Lisbellaw	Land
Western		5 Mullagh Road	Maghera	Land
Western		Roshure Road	Magherafelt	Land
Western		Mullagh Close	Magherafelt	Land
Western		Lisnahall Road	Cookstown	Land
Western		Moneygran Road	Magherafelt	Land
Western		Annagher Road	Dungannon	Land
Western	23	Circular Road	Omagh	Land
Western		Main Road Moygashel	Dungannon	
Western	5	Murley Road	Fivemiletown, Dungannon	Land
Western	1	Railway View	Dungannon	Land
Western		Glenshane Road	Maghera	Land
Western		Altaveedan Road	Fivemiletown	Land
Western	Hogs-Head Car Park	Mc Connell Place	Omagh	Land
Western		Moneymore Road	Cookstown	Land
Western		Edfield Way	Fivemiletown	Land
Western		B49 Berryhill Road / Birch Road	Ballymagorry	Land
Western		Killyman Road	Dungannon	Land
Western		Tamlaght Road	Omagh	Land
Southern		Hillsborough Road	Dromore	Land
Southern		Portadown Road, Killuney	Armagh	Land
Southern	90	Cornakinegar Road	Lurgan	Land

Roads Service Division	House No	Street	Town	Property Description
Southern		Toberhewney Lane Lower	Lurgan	Land
Southern		Martins Lane	Newry	Land
Southern		Farlough Road, The Birches	Portadown	Land
Southern		Meadow Lane	Portadown	Land
Southern		Comber Road	Newtownards	Land
Southern		Rear Of Houses In Lynden Gate- Off Ballyhannon Rd	Portadown	Land
Southern		Carnbane Way	Newry	Land
Southern		Old Armagh Road	Moy	Land
Southern		Linenhall Street	Armagh	Land
Southern		Scotch Street/Thomas Street	Armagh	Land
Southern	Rear Of 3 & 15	Oakridge	Lurgan	Land
Southern	Rear Of 40 - 44	Union Street	Lurgan	Land
Southern		Carn Industrial Estate	Craigavon	Land
Southern		Cordrain	Tandragee	Land
Southern	Rear Of 14	Francis Street	Newry	Land
Southern		Cloughanramer	Newry	Land
Southern		Castle Street	Portadown	Land
Southern		B30 Newry Road	Crossmaglen	Land
Southern	23	Ross Road	Ardglass	Land
Southern		Millvale Road	Newry	Land
Southern		Church Street	Downpatrick	Land
Southern		Church Street	Downpatrick	Land
Southern		Jubilee Road	Newtownards	Land
Southern		Donaghadee Road	Newtownards	Land
Southern		Church Street	Downpatrick	Land
Southern		Church Street	Downpatrick	Land
Southern		Ardglass Road	Downpatrick	Land
Southern		Newtown Gardens	Newtownards	Land
Southern	81-83	Lake Street	Lurgan	Land
Southern		Toberhewney Lane	Lurgan	Land
Southern		Tullynacree Road	Annacloy	Land

Roads Service Division	House No	Street	Town	Property Description
Southern	104	Main Street	Ballywalter	Land
Southern	Rear Of 37 & 39	Trasna Way (Millenium Way)	Lurgan	Land
Southern		Ardress Road	Portadown	Land
Southern		Banbridge Bypass/ Old Manse Green	Banbridge	Land
Southern		Moss Road	Millisle	Land
Southern	Adjacent To 4	Greenpark Terrace	Armagh	Land
Southern	19	Fortfield	Dromore / A1	Land
Southern		Cascum Road	Banbridge	Land
Southern		Hillsborough Road (Adjacent To No 53)	Dromore	Land
Southern		Castle Hill	Gilford, Craigavon	Land
Southern		Silverwood Road	Lurgan	Land
Southern		Glassdrumman Road	Crossmaglen	Land
Southern	8	Alexandra Avenue	Portadown	Land
Southern	12	Parkside	Dromore	Land
Southern	10	Chesterbrook Crescent	Newtownards	Land
Southern		A1 Newry Road	Loughbrickland	Land
Southern	92	Markethill Road	Armagh	Land
Southern		Caledon Road	Armagh	Land
Southern	49	Hillsborough Road	Dromore	Land
Southern		Bus Loop At Rear Of Rushmere Shopping Centre, Lake Road	Craigavon	Land
Southern		Newry Street	Crossmaglen	Land
Southern		Clonmakate Road	Birches, Portadown	Land
Southern		Cascum Lane/A1	Banbridge	Land
Southern	60	Portmore Street	Portadown	Land
Southern		Movilla Road	Newtownards	Land
Southern	11	Bridge Road	Moirra	Land
Southern	168	Dublin Road	Banbridge	Dwelling - Vacant
Southern		Gilpinstown Road/Carrigart Manor	Lurgan	Land

Roads Service Division	House No	Street	Town	Property Description
Southern		Markethill Road	Armagh	Land
Southern		Old Manse/Castlewellan Road	Banbridge	Land
Southern	Land To Rear Of	Derrybeg Villas	Newry	Land
Southern	38	Cloncore Road	Portadown	Land
Southern		Ballymore Road	Tandragee	Land
Southern	24-26	Mahon Road	Portadown	Land
Southern		Ballycloughan Road	Saintfield	Land
Southern	1	St Patricks Avenue	Aghagallon	Land
Southern		Crusher/Glenanne Road	Loughgilly	Land
Southern	22	Fortfield	Dromore	Land
Southern	23	Fortfield	Dromore	Land
Southern	Land At Water Sub Station	Fortfield	Dromore	Land
Southern	36	Fortfield	Dromore	Land
Southern		Millennium Way	Lurgan	Land
Southern		Millennium Way	Lurgan	Land
Southern		Millennium Way	Lurgan	Land
Southern		Maynooth Heights	Richhill	Land
Southern	8	Newry Road	Crossmaglen	Land
Southern	122	Newry Road	Crossmaglen	Land
Southern		Bridge Road	Moir	Land
Southern		Upper Dromore Road	Warrenpoint	Land
Southern		A3 Belfast Road	Dollingstown	Land
Southern		Millennium Way	Lurgan	Land
Southern		Annesborough Road/Kinnegoe Embankment	Lurgan	Land
Southern		Adjacent To M12	Portadown	Land
Southern		3 Annesborough Industrial Estate/Lough Road	Lurgan	Land
Southern		Toberhewney Lane Lower	Lurgan	Land
Southern		Charlestown Road	Portadown	Land
Southern		Flagstaff Road	Newry	Land
Southern		Frederick Street / Corporation Street Link Road	Newtownards	Land

Roads Service Division	House No	Street	Town	Property Description
Southern		Ballynmony Lane	Lurgan	Land
Southern		Dublin Road	Loughbrickland	Land
Southern		Lakeview Road/Balteagh Road	Craigavon	Land
Southern	253	Armagh Road	Newry	Land

Plans for disposal are currently being considered in accordance with the Department of Finance & Personnel's "Disposal of Surplus Public Sector Property in Northern Ireland – March 2010".

NI Water

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the additional audit support services provided to his Department, in relation to NI Water, or to NI Water in each of the last five financial years, giving the company providing the services; and the contractual arrangements of those services.
(AQW 847/11)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by NI Water (NIW) that additional audit support services provided to NIW since it was established on 1 April 2007 have been as follows:

External Audit Services

The following contracts cover the audit of the statutory accounts, the regulatory accounts, the whole of government accounts, and parts of the NI Authority for Utility Regulation (NIAUR) Annual Information Return as specified by NIAUR and the Interim Principal Statement.

- 1 A contract was awarded to KPMG through open competition from 1 April 2007 to 31 March 2010.
- 2 Subsequent to this, a contract was awarded through open competition to KPMG from 1 April 2010 to 31 March 2013 with an option to extend for a further two years.

Prior to 1 April 2010, the external audit service for Water Service was carried out under the direction of the NI Audit Office with no additional support.

Internal Audit Services

- 1 A contract was awarded through open competition to Ernst & Young LLP for the provision of internal audit services. The contract was for 2 years from 1 April 2007 to 31 March 2009, with an option to extend for a further year to 31 March 2010.
- 2 During the transitional period when NIW was seeking to establish its own internal audit function, the following staff substitution services were engaged:
 - ASM Horwath – engagement of a staff substitute for a period of 8 weeks from September 2008 to October 2008. This engagement was on the basis of quotations as the total contract value fell below the competitive tendering threshold;
 - FGS McClure Watters – engagement of a staff substitute for a period of 8 weeks from August 2008 to September 2008. This engagement was on the basis of quotations as the total contract value fell below the competitive tendering threshold; and
 - Deloitte – engagement of a staff substitute for a period of 12 weeks from January 2009 to March 2009. This engagement was awarded under the C328 Professional Services Framework Contract. The C328 contract was established in October 2008 following a full competitive tendering exercise.
- 3 Following the full establishment of its own internal audit function from 1 April 2010, NIW co-sourced from Deloitte - engagement of IT Audit support staff on a staff substitution basis for a

total of 8 days between August and October 2010. This engagement was awarded under the C328 Professional Services Framework Contract.

Prior to 1 April 2010, the internal audit service for Water Service was carried out under the direction of DRD Internal Audit function with no additional support.

Portstewart Promenade

Mr D McClarty asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he would consider introducing designated marked out parking bays along Portstewart Promenade in order to ensure vehicles are properly parked and not causing an obstruction.

(AQW 853/11)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that new waiting restrictions were recently introduced on Portstewart Promenade under the 'Parking Places, Loading Bay and Waiting Restrictions (Portstewart) Order (Northern Ireland), which came into force on 14 August 2010. This Order designated the parking places on the Promenade as lengths of road rather than individual parking spaces.

At this early stage, it is difficult to say whether lengths of road or individual bays will be more efficient, as this will depend on individual driver behaviour. However, I should advise that individual parking bays can only be enforced in charged parking zones.

As the new regulations have only just been introduced, Roads Service will be monitoring the parking situation on the Promenade, particularly over the next summer season, before considering any changes to the legislation. As part of this process, consideration will be given to the introduction of individual bays.

NI Water

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the volume and value of stocks of materials transferred from NI Water depots to private utility contractors' premises; and the reasons for the disposals.

(AQW 864/11)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that it is not aware of any disposal of materials from its depots to contractors' premises. However, it does, on a controlled basis, supply its approved contractors with specialist equipment such as water meters which are stored at its depots.

Water Supply at Milltown Road in Antrim

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister for Regional Development how many times there has been an interruption to the water supply at the Milltown Road in Antrim within the last 18 months; and how much it has cost to repair each time.

(AQW 867/11)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that there were 7 unplanned interruptions to the water supply in the vicinity of Milltown Road, Antrim in the past 18 months. The date of the interruptions and estimated cost of repairs on each occasion is detailed in the table below.

Date	Cost
24 June 2009	£500
16 July 2009	£500
17 August 2010	£800
26 August 2010	£800

Date	Cost
7 September 2010	£500
9 September 2010	£500
27 September 2010	£800
Total	£4,400

Overflowing Sewage in Benmore Drive and Hillmount Gardens, South Belfast

Ms A Lo asked the Minister for Regional Development what measures NI Water has taken to resolve the problem of overflowing sewage in Benmore Drive and Hillmount Gardens, south Belfast over the last two years.

(AQW 870/11)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that it has undertaken a number of investigations on the sewerage system as a result of out-of-sewer flooding problems in Benmore Drive and Hillmount Gardens during the past two years. On most occasions a blockage was found and cleared and a CCTV survey of the sewers in the area found no defects. During these investigations a connection was discovered between the sewer network serving the Hillmount/Benmore area and the network serving the Finaghy Road South area, but this was initially thought not to have contributed to the flooding. Further investigation on 27 and 28 September 2010 identified this connection as a contributory factor to the flooding and work to remove it will be completed on 17 October 2010. NIW is satisfied that this work will reduce the risk of further flooding in the area.

Maintenance of Street Lighting

Ms A Lo asked the Minister for Regional Development what contingency plans the Roads Service has in place to cover the maintenance of street lighting in the eastern division, given the difficulty in employing a new contractor for this work.

(AQW 871/11)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that there were legal contractual issues which prevented the award of the new street lighting contract. During this period, contingency measures were put in place to deal with emergency situations.

I can advise that the legal contractual issues have now been resolved and the new contractor has commenced work. There is a substantial backlog of repairs to street lighting, but it is expected that this should be cleared in the near future.

Independent Review Team

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 255/11, in relation to the full conflict of interest checks carried out on members of the Independent Review Team, to detail (i) the date checks were completed for (a) Jackie Henry; (b) Peter Dixon; and (c) Glenn Thompson; (ii) who was responsible for carrying out these checks; (iii) who advised his Department on the outcome; and (iv) who made the decision that there were no conflicts of interest.

(AQW 876/11)

Minister for Regional Development: I would refer my Assembly colleague to the answer I gave to AQW 255/11 on 28 September 2010. No conflict of interest checks were carried out by DRD, but Deloitte, as part of the normal engagement process, completed a full conflict check on engagements with DRD and NI Water in the context of Jackie Henry, as an individual, joining the review team. The outcome of this was advised to and discussed with DRD and as a result the Department did not consider that there were any conflicts of interest.

Audio Equipment on Buses

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Regional Development when he plans to install audio equipment on buses, similar to that on trains, to assist blind and partially-sighted passengers.

(AQW 877/11)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department is currently working with stakeholders to develop a pilot audio and visual (A/V) scheme on buses which will run in the Belfast area over the winter months and be completed by March 2011. I hope to be in a position to report the results of the pilot exercise in April 2011.

In anticipation of a successful conclusion to this pilot, a bid for resources to roll out the system has been made as part of the spending review. The outcome of the spending review will be known before the end of the pilot and will be factored into the pilot's final report.

Alley-gating Scheme

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development for an estimate of the average cost of an alley-gating scheme for a street.

(AQW 891/11)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department does not fund alleygating schemes or monitor the costs involved. Schemes of this type are funded by individual promoters, for example, Belfast City Council, who would be best placed to provide such an estimate.

IT System Contract Extension

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 417/11, to outline the current status of the IT system contract extension, the cost of the extended contract and when the contract commenced.

(AQW 924/11)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that work is ongoing to confirm the position with regard to its specialised IT systems, which assist in the delivery of the Agency's core business. As such the information requested is not available at this time.

Bangor to Belfast Railway Line

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development if he has any future plans to upgrade the Bangor to Belfast railway line.

(AQW 989/11)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department provided funding to Translink to upgrade the Belfast to Bangor railway line in 2001. Translink have no further plans to upgrade the line again in the immediate future.

Door-to-Door Service

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister for Regional Development how many passengers used the Door-to-Door service in the Mid-Ulster area, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 1037/11)

Minister for Regional Development: The information requested is not available. However I can confirm that there are currently 116 members of the Urban Door-to-Door Transport Scheme resident in Cookstown and that the total number of trips taken by members of the scheme resident in Cookstown and permitted companions in each of the last three years was as follows:

Year	Number
September 2007-August 2008	2,233
September 2008-August 2009	2,581
September 2009-August 2010	3,078
Total	7,892

Disabled Adaptations

Mr J Spratt asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he will exempt people with a disability from paying application fees for disabled adaptations when the building work is over or near a sewer.

(AQW 1129/11)

Minister for Regional Development: Northern Ireland Water (NIW) has a duty to protect the integrity of the public sewerage system and under current legislation it is an offence to build over or near a public sewer without its consent. The fees associated with 'build over a sewer' applications are set out in sections 12.24 and 12.25 of the Northern Ireland Water Scheme of Charges 2010/11 (page 49) and are currently paid by all applicants. The Charges Scheme is approved by the Utility Regulator. Fees cover, for example cost of assessment and approval & inspection (including a closed circuit television inspection of the sewers). I have recently advised Disability Action that my officials have now commenced a review of this aspect of NIW's charging policy and will consider all available evidence.

Department for Social Development

External Media Services

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how much his Department has spent on accessing external media services, such as PR companies, media training, photographers and event managers, in each of the last three financial years.

(AQW 589/11)

Minister for Social Development (Mr A Attwood): The information on consultancy and event organiser costs for the last 3 years is set out in the table below.

With regards to photography, the figures reflect much more community engagement by the Minister for Social Development after the introduction of devolution. I have now initiated steps to reduce the cost, and in-house staff will take many photographs at public engagements. This has already made a difference, for example, in the first three months of this year, compared to last year, the cost has fallen from £9,920 to £6,846. I have instructed my officials to reduce the cost this year by a third.

I have also scaled back media training of staff and can confirm no intention to hire external PR companies. Our in-house staff will continue to perform the role of event organisation and I am pleased to report savings of £77,000 to the public purse in the last two years as a result of this.

	PR Companies £	Media Training £	Photographers £	Event Organisers £
2007-2008	-	1,128	11,233*	1,575
2008-2009	-	4,005	29,057	-
2009-2010	-	1,500	36,292	-

* Photography expenditure figures available for 6 months only from Oct-March 2007/08

Contractors for Housing Executive Projects

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the procedures followed by the Housing Executive when selecting contractors for Housing Executive projects; and if he will make a statement on this matter.

(AQW 640/11)

Minister for Social Development: When selecting contractors for Housing Executive projects the Housing Executive advertises its selection and award criteria. Following submission of tenders an Evaluation Committee will assess both selection and award criteria and will appoint the most appropriate tenderer(s), based on quality and price to take forward the project(s). The letting and award of any contract by the Housing Executive is undertaken by it in accordance with, current relevant procurement law.

You will be aware that I announced on 11 October that I have initiated a fundamental review of the Housing Executive and audit of practice over the short-term. Should these identify any issues surrounding the selection of contractors, I will revisit this issue.

Tendering Processes

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Social Development what checks and balances his Department has in place to monitor the tendering processes carried out by the Department or any of its arms-length bodies or agencies.

(AQW 680/11)

Minister for Social Development: A centralised professional service is provided to the Northern Ireland Public Sector by the Central Procurement Directorate, a Centre of Procurement Expertise supporting the Procurement Board which is responsible for the development, implementation and monitoring of the Northern Ireland Public Procurement Policy which applies to the Department, Agency, Non-Departmental Public Bodies and all other sponsored bodies. Central Procurement Directorate is also responsible for developing best practice guidance in association with the Procurement Practitioners' Group. The Department fully complies with these policies and guidance. In addition, seven Centres, the Housing Executive being one, have been granted the status of Centre of Procurement Expertise and also provide a procurement service to public bodies. Overall compliance with procurement procedures is subject to examination by internal and external audit.

By complying with procurement procedures and guidelines the Department hopes to ensure that proper checks and balances are in place to monitor the procurement tendering process. I have been meeting with Department for Social Development and Central Procurement Directorate officials in relation to a number of procurement policies and issues.

Use of Blown Fibre in Cavity Wall Insulation

Mr R McCartney asked the Minister for Social Development (i) why the Housing Executive held an investigation which led to a temporary halt in the use of blown fibre in cavity wall insulation; (ii) to outline the details and results of this investigation; and (iii) if similar concerns have been raised over the use of bead insulation,

(AQW 688/11)

Minister for Social Development: The Housing Executive became aware that a BBC Wales television investigation had identified possible problems with the use of blown fibre in cavity wall insulation installations. The specific concern raised was that blown fibre can, in some cases, become damp where driving rain penetrates the outer leaf of the cavity wall. This can in turn lead to the damp fibre sinking to the bottom of the cavity creating a bridge across the cavity. The concerns about blown fibre were referred to the Housing Executive's Policy and Standards Manager who was asked to contact BRE*(trading name of Building Research Establishment Limited), to provide an independent objective assessment of the claims made. They reported back that no specific verifiable problems with the use of blown fibre could be found.

The Housing Executive has no knowledge of any similar concerns being raised about the use of bead insulation.

*BRE is used by the Housing Executive for independent advice. BRE offers expert advice, research and knowledge for the built environment sector.

Social Security Agency: Fraud Investigations

Mr J Craig asked the Minister for Social Development how many pro-active fraud investigation initiatives have been undertaken by the Social Security Agency in the last two years.

(AQW 711/11)

Minister for Social Development: Pro-active initiatives are defined as exercises undertaken in response to emerging risks of fraud and are in addition to the bulk of Agency's work on reactive investigations carried out in respect of individual cases. The total number of pro-active fraud initiatives undertaken by Benefit Investigation Service in the last two years is 17. As pro-active initiatives can span more than one year, the reply captures initiatives that have been started or concluded in the last two financial years.

Housing Executive Rent Arrears

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the amount owed in rent arrears to the Housing Executive at the end of each of the last three financial years, broken down by district.

(AQW 740/11)

Minister for Social Development: The table attached provides details of rents arrears by Housing Executive district office area for each of the last three financial years.

TABLE: DETAILS OF RENT ARREARS AT FINANCIAL YEAR END FOR YEARS 2007/08, 2008/09 AND 2009/10

Housing Executive District	Rent arrears at financial year end		
	2007/08 £	2008/09 £	2009/10 £
West Belfast	806,306	758,090	701,576
East Belfast	822,724	802,335	768,609
North Belfast	1,517,085	1,502,671	1,379,594
Shankill	734,744	711,248	697,977
South Belfast	857,596	823,547	784,237
Bangor	542,695	545,007	573,847
Newtownards	574,297	601,884	595,915
Castlereagh	756,883	819,863	800,551
Lisburn Antrim Street	661,003	635,611	594,557
Lisburn Dairy Farm	463,962	439,159	406,529
Downpatrick	383,829	396,365	351,557
Banbridge	193,870	178,107	171,523
Newry	350,214	322,372	242,626

Housing Executive District	Rent arrears at financial year end		
	2007/08 £	2008/09 £	2009/10 £
Armagh	171,722	167,893	157,449
Lurgan/Brownlow	264,024	249,855	236,327
Portadown	253,534	227,674	186,884
Dungannon	209,028	201,140	174,241
Fermanagh	187,555	174,024	173,092
Ballymena	230,649	244,992	287,042
Antrim	236,318	248,901	267,303
Newtownabbey 1	309,236	306,782	318,215
Newtownabbey 2	260,376	280,133	335,223
Carrickfergus	247,066	256,940	310,687
Larne	193,243	198,075	203,296
Ballycastle	78,359	66,165	75,059
Ballymoney	103,817	102,380	118,927
Coleraine	407,109	393,109	383,931
Waterloo Place	172,947	196,494	168,800
Waterside	623,487	614,137	555,504
Collon Terrrace	346,504	385,093	362,198
Limavady	219,779	256,005	238,451
Magherafelt	190,089	192,228	165,784
Strabane	306,578	317,153	271,589
Omagh	199,892	175,462	139,911
Cookstown	127,630	131,847	112,463

People in Housing Stress or Homelessness

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Social Development how many people in the North Down constituency are currently classified as (i) homeless; and (ii) being in housing stress.

(AQW 773/11)

Minister for Social Development: The information is not available in the format requested as the Housing Executive does not collate information by Parliamentary constituency. However, in relation to (i) in the Bangor and Newtownards District Office areas for the period between April and August 2010, 183 and 166 households respectively were awarded Full Duty Applicant status. In relation to (ii) the social housing waiting list at the end of June 2010 showed that 942 applicants were in housing stress in Bangor District Office area and 1,033 in Newtownards District Office area.

Warm Homes Scheme

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQO 150/11, how many people who applied for the Warm Homes Scheme in each of the last five years were in receipt of rates relief and how many of these applications were refused.

(AQW 781/11)

Minister for Social Development: Rates Relief is not a qualifying benefit for the Warm Homes Scheme and never has been a qualifying benefit for the Scheme. In order to qualify for assistance from the Warm Homes Scheme an applicant must be in receipt of a qualifying benefit. Housing Benefit, which can include an element for rates relief, is a qualifying benefit for the Warm Homes Scheme. Applicants who are in receipt of rate relief but not housing benefit cannot satisfy the scheme criterion on that basis.

The Department holds information relating to successful applications to the Scheme, the Department does not hold any information regarding why applications were not successful.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister for Social Development how many people are currently within each category of Disability Living Allowance awards at the (i) higher rate; and (ii) lower rate.

(AQW 800/11)

Minister for Social Development: Disability Living Allowance consists of a care component which can be awarded at higher rate, middle rate or lower rate and a mobility component which can be awarded at higher rate or lower rate. Some people will be entitled to receive just one component; others may get both depending on how the disability affects them.

The table below shows the numbers of people within each category of Disability Living Allowance award components at May 2010.

Category of Disability Living Allowance Award	Numbers of People
Higher rate care only	2,456
Middle rate care only	10,533
Lower rate care only	11,777
Higher rate mobility only	8,761
Lower rate mobility only	3,078
Higher rate care and higher rate mobility	32,436
Higher rate care and lower rate mobility	15,862
Middle rate care and higher rate mobility	39,025
Middle rate care and lower rate mobility	41,122
Lower rate care and higher rate mobility	15,606
Lower rate care and lower rate mobility	4,268

Pensioners' Bungalows in the Bloomfield Estate, Bangor

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Social Development if he would consider selling land in the North Down area to cover the cost of work required on the pensioners' bungalows in the Bloomfield Estate, Bangor.

(AQW 813/11)

Minister for Social Development: The Housing Executive sells part of its assets each year including houses and land which generate income to help fund programmes. However, as a result of the

significant downturn in the housing and property market there has been a dramatic reduction in such income to fund programmes. The proposed Multi-Element Improvement scheme for the Bloomfield Estate cannot proceed as the significant resources need to take it forward are no longer available. However, a Maintenance Investment Strategy review is underway which the Housing Executive anticipates will be completed by the end of the year. The review is considering the stock investment priorities for the Housing Executive over the next five year period, bearing in mind competing priorities for finance. This process will help inform how to address the problems in properties such as these bungalows in the Bloomfield Estate.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr R McCartney asked the Minister for Social Development what he is doing to achieve a retention of more than 84 days of Disability Living Allowance for families who have a sick child in hospital.
(AQW 855/11)

Minister for Social Development: Payment of disability living allowance is usually withdrawn after 28 days in hospital. The period is extended to 84 days in hospital for children under 16 years of age in recognition of the additional special needs they may have for support from their parents whilst they are adjusting to hospital life. Disability living allowance is paid as a contribution towards the extra costs arising from a person's care and mobility needs as a result of severe disability. These needs are met free of charge during a period of treatment in hospital. To leave benefit in payment indefinitely would mean that there was double provision from public funds for the same need.

Children with a Long-term Illness

Mr R McCartney asked the Minister for Social Development what financial support is put in place to assist families who have a child with a long-term illness or disability confined to hospital for more than 84 days.
(AQW 856/11)

Minister for Social Development: There is a range of help available for families on low incomes within the benefits system, including community care grants to cover travelling expenses to visit a sick child in hospital. Disability living allowance is usually withdrawn after 28 days in hospital because the person's care and mobility needs are being met by the hospital, however, this is extended to 84 days in hospital in respect of children under 16 in recognition of the additional special needs they may have for support from their parents whilst they are adjusting to hospital life.

Employment Support Allowance Branch

Mr G Savage asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) the time taken for an appeal to be processed by Employment Support Allowance branch to the Appeals Service; (ii) the number of people affected by this delay; and (iii) what action he is taking to resolve this issue.
(AQW 897/11)

Minister for Social Development: The information requested is set out below:

- (i) The target for the Employment and Support (ESA) Centre to process an appeal to The Appeals Service (TAS) is 45 days. During September, the average actual clearance time (AACT) was 42.5 days, and year to date the AACT is 40.3 days.
- (ii) There are occasions when the processing of an appeal takes longer than 45 days due to an individual's circumstances and the complexity of the benefit. 327 appeals are currently outside the 45 day target.
- (iii) The ESA Centre has a range of checks in place on appeals, including specific checks on appeals outside the 45 day target. Managers monitor these appeals to ensure that any outstanding information is quickly obtained and cases are promptly referred to TAS.

Employment and Support Allowance Branch

Mr G Savage asked the Minister for Social Development (i) to detail the delays caused by the Employment and Support Allowance Branch in processing appeals; (ii) how many customers are affected; and (iii) what action is being taken to resolve the delays.

(AQW 903/11)

Minister for Social Development: The information requested is set out below:

- (i) The Employment and Support Allowance Centre is meeting the 45 day average clearance time target for processing appeals. However, there are occasions when an appeal may miss the 45 day target. These delays are often due to the need to obtain further evidence and the processing of more complex cases.
- (ii) To date, the Centre has received 8,208 appeals, and currently has 951 appeals outstanding, well within the acceptable outstanding level. Of the 951 appeals outstanding, 327 are outside the 45 day target. A majority of these (179) have been delayed due to a legal loophole that resulted in continuous appeal cycles for the same customers. However this has been revoked by a legislative change introduced on 28 June and work is well underway to prepare and send these appeals to The Appeals Service (TAS).
- (iii) The ESA Centre has a range of checks in place on appeals, including specific checks on appeals outside the 45 day target. Managers monitor these appeals to ensure that any outstanding information is quickly obtained and cases are promptly referred to TAS.

Homelessness in Carrickfergus

Mr D Hilditch asked the Minister for Social Development how many people in Carrickfergus are currently considered homeless.

(AQW 943/11)

Minister for Social Development: 112 households were awarded Full Duty Applicant status within the Housing Executive's Carrickfergus District Office area for the period April and August 2010.

Warm Homes Scheme

Mr D Hilditch asked the Minister for Social Development how many homes in Carrickfergus have availed of the Warm Homes Scheme in each of the last three years.

(AQW 954/11)

Minister for Social Development: The current Warm Homes Scheme delivered by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive commenced on 1 July 2009. Prior to that, the scheme was delivered by EAGA plc. When their contract for Warm Homes ended, EAGA handed over all the records they held relating to the scheme to the Department for Social Development. The Northern Ireland Housing Executive holds those records on behalf of the Department. It is not possible to analyse those records in the manner requested. However, since the start of the new Warm Homes Scheme on 1 July 2009, 298 homes in Carrickfergus have benefitted from the scheme (July 2009 to March 2010) and to date in 2010/2011 a further 117 homes have benefitted from the scheme.

Irresponsible Drinks Promotions

Ms A Lo asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the progress of his proposals to control irresponsible drinks promotions by pubs, clubs, supermarkets and other outlets.

(AQW 976/11)

Minister for Social Development: I have received Executive approval to consult on the inclusion of a power to prohibit or restrict irresponsible alcohol promotions in pubs, clubs, supermarkets and other outlets.

A consultation process will now be undertaken, responses to which will be requested by early December 2010. Subject to the results of the consultation, it is intended to table an amendment to the Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill, to enable my officials to prepare regulations on alcohol promotions. It is intended the ban on irresponsible alcohol promotions will be in place by summer 2011.

Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill

Ms A Lo asked the Minister for Social Development if he intends to amend the Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill to reduce the proposed 150% increase in late night openings for clubs in line with public opinion.

(AQW 978/11)

Minister for Social Development: The draft Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill will allow registered clubs to apply to PSNI for up to 120 late bars to 1.00am each year instead of the existing 52. The Bill is currently in its Committee stage and I believe that representations to the Committee will indicate that opinion is divided on this matter. I will await the Committee's Report which is due in November before I consider any amendments to the Bill.

Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill

Ms A Lo asked the Minister for Social Development if he has consulted the Minister of Justice on the removal of the 'imminent disorder' and 'noise nuisance' grounds in the Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill, under which a single licensed premises can be directed to close.

(AQW 979/11)

Minister for Social Development: Most of the consultation on this issue took place prior to the transfer of policing and justice in April. The Northern Ireland Office and PSNI were fully aware of these proposed amendments and the Minister for Justice, David Ford MLA, attended the Executive Committee meeting which approved the introduction of the Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill to the Assembly.

Housing Executive's Special Circumstances Committee

Mr M Brady asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) the number of cases considered by the Housing Executive's Special Circumstances Committee in each of the last five years; and (ii) the number of these applications that were successful, broken down by local Council area.

(AQW 1011/11)

Minister for Social Development: I assume the Member is referring to the Housing Executive's Exceptional Circumstances Committee which was formed in April 2009. The information is not available in the format requested as that Committee has not been in place for the last five years and the information is only held by Housing Executive Grant Office area. However, the tables below detail the cases reviewed by the Exceptional Circumstances Committee by Housing Executive Grants Office administrative area for the years 2009/10 and 2010/11 to date, as well as the grants offered on completion of the review by the Committee.

TABLE 1 DETAILING THE CASES REVIEWED BY EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES COMMITTEE IN 2009/10 AND 2010/201:-

Grants Office	Cases Reviewed	
	2009/10	2010/11 to date
Ballyclare	16	6
Ballymena	35	0
Belfast	54	11

Grants Office	Cases Reviewed	
	2009/10	2010/11 to date
Craigavon	41	0
Derry	21	4
Dundonald	13	0
Fermanagh	72	3
Lisburn	29	12
Newry	41	9
Omagh	19	0

TABLE 2 DETAILING THE GRANTS OFFERED AFTER REVIEW BY EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES COMMITTEE IN 2009/10 AND 2010/11

Grants Office	Grants Offered	
	2009/10	2010/11 to date
Ballyclare	15	1
Ballymena	31	0
Belfast	38	7
Craigavon	36	0
Derry	19	1
Dundonald	10	0
Fermanagh	45	2
Lisburn	17	4
Newry	28	3
Omagh	18	0

Community Care Grants

Mr J Spratt asked the Minister for Social Development the average time taken to process Community Care grants in the (i) South Belfast; and (ii) Lagan Valley constituencies.

(AQW 1046/11)

Minister for Social Development: The information is not available in the form requested. Performance data on Social Fund applications (including Community Care Grants) is not maintained by the Social Security Agency at individual Parliamentary constituency level. The average time taken by the Agency (year to date August 2010) to process Community Care Grants was 12.1 days against a target of 12.0 days.

Homelessness in Carrickfergus

Mr D Hilditch asked the Minister for Social Development how many people under 18 years old in Carrickfergus are considered homeless,

(AQW 1058/11)

Minister for Social Development: Five people under 18 years old presented as homeless in Carrickfergus between April and September 2010. None were accepted as Full Duty Applicant status.

Communities at Risk Project in the Beechfield Estate in Donaghadee

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the Communities at Risk project in the Beechfield Estate in Donaghadee.

(AQW 1068/11)

Minister for Social Development: The 'Areas at Risk' Project has been progressing well within the Beechfield estate. As you are aware, given your active involvement in the estate, I was able to fund some small programme and developmental work from May through until December 2010 to build on the work undertaken to date. A draft Areas at Risk proposal seeking funding for a two year development programme is now being finalised by Ards Development Bureau and Community Network in conjunction with the Beechfield Residents Association. The proposal will then be submitted to my Department's Voluntary and Community Unit for appraisal. If agreed it is anticipated that this programme will begin in January 2010.

Neighbourhood Renewal

Ms J McCann asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the services currently funded, fully or partly, by his Department under Neighbourhood Renewal in the West Belfast constituency.

(AQW 1111/11)

Minister for Social Development: The West Belfast constituency covers six Neighbourhood Renewal areas; Colin, Lenadoon, Andersonstown, Upper Springfield/Whiterock, Greater Falls, and Shankill. Services funded by the Department under Neighbourhood Renewal are delivered by a variety of community based organisations within these areas. These services include: health, education, employment and learning, childcare, community development and relations, crime prevention and victim support, environment, economic development, housing, welfare and benefit support, and youth related matters. A list of the organisations by Neighbourhood Renewal area in receipt of funding for the delivery of these services will be placed in the NI Assembly library.

Northern Ireland Assembly Commission

The Balmoral Show 2010

Miss M McIlveen asked the Assembly Commission (i) to detail the cost to the Assembly of attendance at the 2010 Balmoral Show; (ii) the number of people who visited the Assembly marquee; and (iii) for an assessment of the value for money of participation in this event.

(AQW 690/11)

The Representative of the Assembly Commission (Mr P Weir):

- (i) The overall cost to the Assembly for attendance at the Balmoral Show was £15,462.59. A more detailed breakdown of the costs is enclosed in Appendix A.

Value for money was a driving force in the planning of this event with costs minimised by sourcing equipment from Parliament Buildings to furnish the marquee. Alternative catering, provided by our contract partners, was also explored but set aside due to health and safety considerations.

(ii)

- a 3,112 people went inside the marquee and took part in Assembly activities.
- b Other Assembly activities that took place outside the marquee on the first day drew an additional estimated 2,000 people.

(iii)

- a The aim of the Northern Ireland Assembly attending the Balmoral Show was to make it easier for people to come along and meet their MLAs, and to promote the work of Assembly Committees in the context of rural affairs. This objective was achieved in that seven

- Committees participated in the event, with one formal Committee meeting, as well as events for the Northern Ireland Assembly & Business Trust and the Assembly Youth Panel.
- b The Balmoral Show is Northern Ireland's largest agricultural event and attracts over 70,000 people over the course of three days. Participation in the Show represented a unique opportunity to capitalise on the high number of visitors to the Show and represented value for money in terms of using an existing event with high footfall rather than initiating such an event from scratch, which would entail significant costs.
 - c Examples of the different and diverse range of events located at the marquee were:
 - i Seven separate Assembly committees - the Agriculture Committee, the Public Accounts Committee, Employment and Learning Committee, Regional Development Committee and Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee and Environment Committee and the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment attended the event, attracting significant visitors. For example, approximately 250 people attended the formal meeting of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development which is the largest attendance at any single Committee meeting. 976 people also attended the Q&A session with the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development.
 - ii. The Assembly Youth Panel engaged with a range of rural stakeholders during a workshop.
 - iii. The Northern Ireland Assembly and Business Trust hosted a 'Challenges and Opportunities for SMEs' event with MEPs, as well as a business lunch on 'Looking to Europe'.

APPENDIX A

	Net Cost	VAT	Gross Cost
Rented Space	3216.08	562.82	3822.9
Tickets	2166.8	380.75	2547.55
Technical services	2228.08	390.92	2619
Catering	2131.89	373.08	2504.97
Printed services	2,886.63	363.29	3,249.92
Misc	677.04	41.21	718.25
Totals			£15,462.59

NI Assembly: IT System

Mr B McElduff asked the Assembly Commission what measures it is taking to address the current internet problems within the Assembly's IT system, given that regular lack of access to the internet and emails has a disruptive effect on the work output of Members and staff.

(AQW 736/11)

The Representative of the Assembly Commission (Rev Dr R Coulter): The Northern Ireland Assembly Commission provides a fully featured, internally based, email system for use by Members, Party Support staff and Secretariat staff on Assembly business. This system has been designed with a high degree of availability.

The Assembly Commission also operates a "Shared Service" arrangement with the Northern Ireland Civil Service to ensure a secure connection to internet based resources. There has been an increasing demand for a large number of feature rich websites from all users of the internet connection within Parliament Buildings including;

- Members,
- Members' staff,
- Party support staff,

- Party staff,
- Secretariat staff,
- Guests to the building including journalists, NICS staff and visitors.

To counteract the demand for live video streaming and playback of Assembly related material from external websites such as Democracy Live and the Assembly's own website, the new TV distribution system streams video to PC equipment connected to the main Assembly network and to TVs. It features audio and video recordings of Plenary, Committee meetings, local news programmes and current affairs programmes. The internal network is designed to handle this traffic and further use of this facility should reduce demand on the internet connection.

The Assembly has restricted access by Secretariat staff to a number of non essential websites and is now investigating how to prioritise all traffic to ensure that external email sites such as Hotmail, Yahoo and Google Mail are accessible during busy periods.

In addition, a number of technical measures are used to reduce the pressure on the internet connection by storing frequently requested web pages and files locally for use when another user requests the same page or file. At present these system are able to provide 50% of requested pages and files.

The Assembly Commission recognises that these represent short term measures and a project has been initiated to seek to obtain a replacement secure internet service for the Assembly's exclusive use.

Surplus Land

Dr A McDonnell asked the Assembly Commission to detail any (i) land; and (ii) property owned by the Commission which is currently deemed surplus to requirements, including the location of the land or property and any plans for its disposal.

(AQW 838/11)

The Representative of the Assembly Commission (Mr S Neeson): The Assembly Commission has deemed the Ormiston House site to be surplus to requirements and, following an unsuccessful attempt to offer the property to other government bodies, approval has been granted to place the property on the open market.

In parallel with this, planning approval will be sought for limited development of the site to try to make the purchase of the site attractive to a wider range of buyers.

Ormiston House is located at 48 Hawthornden Road, Knock, Belfast.

The Commission has no other land or property that is currently deemed surplus to requirements.

Historically Significant Items

Mr A McQuillan asked the Assembly Commission to provide an inventory of all historically significant items held by the Commission within Parliament Buildings (i) between 1921 and 1972; and (ii) currently.
(AQW 955/11)

The Representative of the Assembly Commission (Mr S Neeson): As requested, please find enclosed an inventory of artefacts currently held by the Assembly.

Unfortunately we do not have a record of historically significant items held by the Commission within Parliament Buildings between 1921 and 1972.

Description Artwork	Location
Portrait of Rt. Hon JM Andrews by F McKelvey	In storage

Description Artwork	Location
Portrait of Rt. Hon, Sir Basil Brooke Bart Prime Minister for N.I 1943-63	On long term loan to Viscount Brookeborough
Portrait of Viscount Craigavon by N Becher	In storage
Portrait of Sir Henry Wilson by HW Gates	In storage
Portrait of Lord Armaghdale by Riviere	In storage
Portrait of Frederick Temple by C Williams	In storage
Portrait of HM the Queen Lydia de Burgh	On loan to Hillsborough Castle
State opening of N.I Parliament small version by William Conor	Room 41
State opening of NI. Parliament large version by William Conor	Senate
William III, The Duke of Schomberg and the Pope by Pieter Van der Meulen	Room 40
Oil painting, an Obelisk at the Boyne by J Tudor	In storage
Print of Sydenham Belmont & surrounding area	In storage
Print showing service for Queen Victoria's Jubilee	In storage
Photograph of Queen Victoria	In storage
Print of Irish House of Commons	Room 40
Large framed display of Historic Parliamentary Occasions 1945	In storage
Collection of framed photographs of former Speakers of the NI House of Commons	In storage and Room 41
Framed sealed indenture of Stormont Estate	In storage
Collection of miscellaneous photographs of Parliament Buildings and historic events therein	In storage
Portrait of Mr Seamus Mallon MP by Rita Duffy unveiled 25 March 2003	On display on the 1st Floor
"The Assembly in Session" by Noel Murphy February 2003	Room 41
"The House will divide" by Noel Murphy unveiled 10th February 2003	Senate
Portrait of Lord Alderdice by Carol Graham unveiled on 11 March 2005	This painting will be displayed on the ground floor
Portrait of The Lord Bannside by David Nolan unveiled 28th June 2010	On display on the 1st Floor
46 Rowel Friers drawings of Members of the Northern Ireland Parliament 1972	Members coffee lounge
Framed letter from HRH Duke of Edinburgh	In storage
Collection of framed photographs of former speakers of the NI House of Commons	In storage

Description Artwork	Location
La Baie by Brigitte Coté Canadian Landscape Limited Edition print No 62/80	Room 41
Clothing	
Speakers state robes x 2 (both were fire damaged 1 has been restored) and Speakers full bottomed wig in carry case Collection of clerks' uniforms and wigs Black rod's uniform and sword	In storage
Ceremonial Tabard of Ulster King of Arms	On loan to Hillsborough castle
Miscellaneous	
Coronation vase decorated with the Queen's beasts	Room 3
Japanese officer's sword and covering letter from Earl Mountbatten of Burma	FMs Office
Bronze bust of Sir Frederick Temple	In storage
Ships bell HMS Ulster in ornamental stand	FMs Office
Mantle clock by Evill of Bath	In storage
Model of Thiepval memorial tower	In storage
French clock with bronze statue of nobleman	In storage
Red leather dispatch boxes embossed with Royal Arms of Ulster	Senate
Black leather dispatch boxes with Royal Arms of Ulster and cypher of George V	Room 41
2 Jardinaires reputedly made from the timbers of the "Mountjoy" which breached the boom on the river Foyle during the siege of Derry 1689	1 in storage and 1 is on loan.
Gilded throne	In storage
"Act of union" table	In storage
Maori inkstand	In storage
Books containing the names of the civilian war dead	In storage
Bronze relief map set in mahogany table	In storage
Miscellaneous collection of souvenirs from meetings of the commonwealth Parliamentary Association (located in the library)	In storage
Cigar lighter presented by the Royal College of Nursing, founders day 1960	In storage
Egg timer silver with crest of NI. Presented by Rt Hon Thomas Moles (first chairman of ways and means) to the House of Commons	In storage
3 x bibles	In storage

Description Artwork	Location
Memorial gift a union flag, a picture of Jesus Christ and a picture of “roaring meg” with accompanying letters. Given to the NI Parliament in memory of Senator James Bailie.	In storage
A minton gold crown crested plate. Two coins in presentation frame, commemorating the opening of the NI Parliament, June 1921. Collection of a bottle, goblets and saucers in blue pottery. A boxed camera and case and various military items.	In storage
Selection of fire damaged items recovered from the Parliament Buildings fire January 1995 and a set of photographs showing fire damage and repair work in progress	In storage
Silver	In storage
Black Rod’s Ward of Office ebony with silver gilt mounts with ceremonial lion and bulbous gold scrolling. Presented by the Marquis of Dufferin and Ava, First Speaker of the Senate in Northern Ireland	In storage
The Parliament golf handicap challenge cup 1927 silver two-handled trophy dated 1926 and other silver ware	In storage
2 sterling silver maces	Room 41
Items of Silver Dinner Service	In storage

Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 22 October 2010

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Investment from International or Independent Sources

Mr T Lunn asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail their Department's expenditure in each of the past 5 years, arising out of investment from international or independent sources, on community and good relations work, broken down by (i) programme; and (ii) recipient.
(AQW 70/11)

First Minister and deputy First Minister (Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness): OFMDFM has worked in partnership with a range of independent and international organisations to support good relations projects over the last several years. Regarding the detail requested in this question, we refer only to match funding provided directly by OFMDFM to Community Relations projects. Expenditure by other bodies, particularly the Community Relations Council, may lever in other sources of funding.

Hewlett Packard has supported the Digital Communities Project in Belfast since 2005 through the provision of match funding for the Project Manager's post and also with the provision of free IT equipment.

Atlantic Philanthropies has supported the Suffolk and Lenadoon Interface Project since 2009 through the provision of match funding for 3 staff posts.

European Peace funding has also been made available for a range of good relations projects. SEUPB is the Managing Authority for Peace funding and holds the details of the individual recipients.

The table below provides details of the sources, recipients and amounts of funding.

OFMDFM Community Relations Programme						
Source / Recipient	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Hewlett Packard / Digital Communities	£25	£25k	£25k	£25k		
Atlantic Philanthropies / Suffolk & Lenadoon Interface Group					£33k	£55k

PEACE II & PEACE III						
Source / Recipient	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
PEACE II Extension FAIR		185k				
PEACE II Extension Chinese Welfare Association				250k		
PEACE III					7,644k	

Community Relations Council

Mr S Anderson asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what mechanisms currently exist to monitor how the Community Relations Council allocates departmental funding to (i) core funding; and (ii) project funding.

(AQW 503/11)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: OFMDFM monitors the Community Relations Council (CRC) via the corporate plan, the annual report /accounts and the CRC Performance Indicators and via attendance at the CRC Board meetings and various committee meetings – Finance & General Purpose and Community Initiatives Committee meetings. There are also quarterly accountability meetings. These mechanisms exist for both core funding and project funding. Core funding grants are approved on delegated authority against published criteria approved by the Department.

Full compliance and detail are agreed to in the Financial Memorandum document which is amended when either body wishes and the other is in agreement.

As part of the current CSI consultation we are seeking views on the most appropriate structures for the future delivery of good relations funding.

Northern Ireland Memorial Fund

Mr D Kennedy asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the proposal, made in June 2010, that the Northern Ireland Memorial Fund should move to a “needs based approach”.

(AQW 872/11)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: Discussions are continuing between the Northern Ireland Memorial Fund and the Department. We are currently giving careful consideration to detailed proposals submitted by the Memorial Fund.

In this financial year the Fund has received £1,137, 500, which continues to support individual victims and survivors.

Northern Ireland Memorial Fund

Mr D Kennedy asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the current funding and spending arrangements for the Northern Ireland Memorial Fund.

(AQW 873/11)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: The Northern Ireland Memorial Fund (NIMF) has been grant funded by the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister since September 2006. To date the NIMF has received funding in excess of £7.5m.

For the financial year 2010/11 the Fund received a Letter of Offer for £1,137,500.

Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration

Mr P Weir asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) why separate additional consultation is taking place with certain groups and sectors on the Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration; (ii) what sectors or groups were selected for additional consultation; and (iii) the reasons why each of these groups or sectors were selected.

(AQW 884/11)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: The consultation process has been designed to consist of a combination of public meetings and a series of more focused, sectoral events. It is hoped that these aspects will complement each other to inform the debate around the Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration, thus leading to enriched consultation responses.

Throughout the consultation period, we will consult with the District Council Good Relations Officers; Churches; Business Community; Victims & Survivors; Ex-Prisoners; Young People; Minority Ethnic

Groups; Statutory Bodies; Funders in the Good Relations Arena; Academics; Education Sector; Voluntary & Community Sector; and LGB&T Sector

The above sectors were chosen for a variety of reasons including their role in delivering and/or promoting the Good Relations Programme; social impact of business organisations; the need to tackle both sectarianism and racism; research interest in Good Relations; and at the specific request of some of the above groups.

We will hold two sectoral events with the voluntary and community sector – one in Belfast and one in the north-west.

Officials will consider separate requests to give presentations on the Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration to groups/areas that are unable to participate in the consultation events, within the constraints of the mainstream process.

Youth Work Projects and Groups in North Belfast

Ms C ní Chuilín asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail (i) the funding allocated for this financial year by their Department to youth work projects and groups in north Belfast, including groups based in the city centre; (ii) the groups receiving this funding; and (iii) the amount and duration of the funding.

(AQW 894/11)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: OFMDFM provides good relations funding for the Belfast area via a range of delivery agents including Belfast City Council; the Community Relations Council; the North Belfast Strategic Good Relations Programme Contract Holders and the Department of Education and the Education and Library Boards. As some of these are third party organisations it is not possible to provide all the details in the format requested.

In the 2010/11 financial year, OFMDFM has provided good relations funding of 578,061 to Belfast City Council. This includes a Small Grant Scheme budget of £262,500 and £100,000 for Summer Intervention Programmes administered by community groups across Belfast.

The department has also invested £400,000 in a range of summer interventions programmes administered on behalf of OFMDFM by the Department of Education and the Education and Library boards, of which £160,000 was earmarked for Belfast and £40,000 for North Belfast.

The Community Relations Council provides funding to a range of community groups across the city via its Pathfinder, Core Funding and Community Relations/Community Development programmes. Some of that funding is allocated to youth programmes as detailed below.

COMMUNITY RELATIONS FUNDING

APRIL 2010 – MARCH 2011

Community Relations/Community Development Programme		
Name of Group	Short description	Amount Awarded
Newhill FC	Cultural Traditions Training Programme 2010	£3,360
The Bytes Project	Respect Us & Us and Them Again training programmes	£2,275
Cliftonville Community Regeneration Forum	Development of Good Relations at Interfaces Programme	£3,200
ArtsEkta	Diwali & Samhain Cultural Festival	£2,250

Community Relations/Community Development Programme		
Name of Group	Short description	Amount Awarded
	CR/CD Total	£11,085
Pathfinder Programme		
Tar Isteach	Multi-Cultural Family Fun Day	£4,000
Belfast First Church of the Nazarene	Development of shared space facility for young adults.	£1,500
Woodvale & Cambria Youth & Community Association	Bonfire Beacon Festival Event	£9,500
Ligoniel Improvement Association	Summer Diversionary Youth Programme- Common Culture	£3,200
Whitewell Community Association	Summer Youth Diversionary Programme	£5,000
Ardoyne Women's Group	Summer Cultural Diversity Project	£2,474
Public Achievement	Away from Violence Summer Camp	£4,754
Ard Eoin Fleadh Project	Ard Eoin Fleadh - Summer Festival	£10,000
	Pathfinder Total	£40,428

Core Funding		
Organisation	Amount	Term of award
174 Trust	£44,000.00	up to 3 years
Intercomm	£24,218.00	up to 2 years
North Belfast Interface Network	£84,915.00	up to 30 months
Core Funding Total	£153,133.00	

Although the department does not fund any youth groups directly it does fund a series of contract holder organisations in North Belfast, some of which do fund youth programmes details are as follows.

YOUTH PROGRAMMES MANAGED BY CONTRACT HOLDERS FOR THE NORTH BELFAST STRATEGIC GOOD RELATIONS PROGRAMME

APRIL 2010 – MARCH 2011

Contract Holder	Youth Programme	Amount Allocated
Ballysillan Community Forum	Education through Mutual Understanding	£3,384
	Cross Community Youth Forum/ Young Peoples Programme	£17,330
	Challenging Diversity	£5,156
	Mutual Understanding	£3,340
	Building Good Relations	£7,632

Contract Holder	Youth Programme	Amount Allocated
Ardoyne Youth Providers Forum	Cross Community Youth Forum	£49,386
Ashton Community Trust	Community Pride	£40,000
Cliftonville Community Regeneration Forum	Cross Community Youth Forum (Common Purpose)	£28,670
Mount Vernon Community Development Forum and Loughside Credit Union	Schools Respect Programme	£7,700
	Cross community Youth Forum	£23,700
	Schools Environmental Programme	£25,000
	Common Purpose	£7,500
	Cave Hill to Belfast Lough	£12,000
Shankill Women's Centre	Peer Leadership	£10,000
Rathcoole Churches Community Group	Coole Dimensions	£10,000
	Total	£250,798

Definitions of Cohesion, Sharing, Integration and Good Relations

Dr S Farry asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline their Department's definitions of (i) cohesion; (ii) sharing; (iii) integration; and (iv) good relations.

(AQW 925/11)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: The title of the document is intended to reflect the positive direction in which the Executive would like to see society here develop in a context of fairness, equality, rights, respect and responsibility. An important part of the extensive public consultation on the draft programme is intended to elicit views from the public and civic society its understanding of the concepts of cohesion, sharing and integration.

It is recognised that a cohesive society is one in which everyone can live, work and socialise together free from intimidation and prejudice.

In the context of the CSI programme, sharing implies the promotion of shared and safe spaces for working, shopping, socialising and playing; shared accessible and welcoming facilities which provide high quality public services; safety for individuals and groups who wish to express and celebrate their identity or culture peacefully; sharing in education and sharing in the workplace.

The term integration relates to the longer-term goals of a society which is at one with itself where difference is valued and celebrated and not derided or feared.

Good Relations is generally accepted to mean the promotion of better relations between all sections of the community participating in our society through increased cross-community contact and co-operation and by encouraging mutual respect, understanding and appreciation of cultural diversity.

The choice of the title cohesion sharing and integration for the new draft policy is also subject to discussion as part of the ongoing public consultation process and may be revised prior to the publication of the final policy.

Craigavon Travellers Support Committee

Mr S Moutray asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQW 226/11, what mechanisms are in place to ensure value for money in relation to the £45k allocated to the Craigavon Travellers Support Committee.

(AQW 965/11)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: In common with all other applications for funding under OFMDFM's Minority Ethnic Development Fund, Craigavon Travellers Support Committee application for funding was considered by a selection committee including individuals independent of the department. The application was assessed against a set of objective and transparent criteria which were carefully aligned to the Executive's Racial Equality Strategy 2005-2010. In line with best practice in selection procedures, for the purposes of fairness and comparability, organisations are assessed solely on the quality of their applications. The selection committee takes value for money considerations into account as a significant part of their overall assessment.

Craigavon Travellers Support Committee is a well-established organisation, which provides a range of important services to the Irish Traveller community in the Craigavon area. Their work is undertaken in 5 key areas; early years, education, community development, advice and health. OFMDFM funding allows the organisation to contribute to the overall aims of promoting good relations between people of different ethnic backgrounds, building community cohesion, and facilitating integration.

Organisations funded under the Minority Ethnic Development Fund are required to submit regular monitoring reports to the department which give an update on the progress of the funded project.

Funded organisations are subject to at least one verification visit per year which focuses on a sample of financial documentation in relation to the project. This visit can also cover any aspect, such as the administrative and financial management of the project or the progress of the project itself.

In the specific case of the public funding allocated to the Craigavon Travellers Support Committee the contractual Letter of Offer, as is normal in such cases, stipulated a wide range of governance requirements on the part of the Committee to ensure that the funding was used only for the purposes formally approved.

Commissioner for Children and Young People

Mr S Moutray asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQW 551/11, whether the review of the office of the Commissioner for Children and Young People will consider the disbandment of the Commissioner and the absorption of its functions elsewhere in the Executive.

(AQW 1000/11)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: The primary focus of this review is to examine the efficacy of the current arrangements in delivering the necessary services.

Capital Projects in the Mid-Ulster Area

Mr I McCrea asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail their Department's capital projects in the Mid-Ulster area in each of the last five years.

(AQW 1038/11)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: OFMDFM has not undertaken any capital projects in Mid-Ulster during this period.

Community Groups in South Belfast

Dr A McDonnell asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail (i) the community groups in South Belfast which have been in receipt of European Union funding through their Department; (ii) the

amounts they have received since 1998; and (iii) the community group posts including the number, job title and remit which have been funded.

(AQW 1040/11)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: The only European Union funding that OFMDFM delivered under Peace II was for 'capital build' projects. The Peace II Extension was administered on behalf of the department by the Community Relations Council for capital build projects; it is also responsible for the administration of the Peace III programme.

It is not possible to provide information on those projects for the South Belfast area since the information held would not specify a geographic area.

The Special European Union Programme Branch (SEUPB) is the Managing Authority for Peace funding and holds the details of the individual recipients of the funding. Therefore, further information on groups in receipt of European Funding in the South Belfast area should be available from SEUPB.

Neighbourhood Renewal

Ms J McCann asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the services currently funded, fully or partly, by their Department under Neighbourhood Renewal in the West Belfast constituency.

(AQW 1063/11)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: Neighbourhood Renewal is a Department for Social Development led initiative. OFMDFM is not funding any services under Neighbourhood Renewal. However, our policy programmes operate in support of that programme and help address issues of equality and poverty in areas of disadvantage.

Funding Schemes

Mr P Weir asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what grants or funding schemes are available from their Department, or its arms-length bodies, to assist with projects undertaken by (i) groups for people with disabilities; or (ii) residential care facilities which cater for people with disabilities.

(AQW 1081/11)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: OFMDFM does not currently offer grants or have any funding schemes to assist with projects undertaken by (i) groups for people with disabilities; or (ii) residential care facilities which cater for people with disabilities.

Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration

Mr T Lunn asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for their assessment of the need address educational segregation in order to implement a viable Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration.

(AQW 1096/11)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: We believe that it is important to address all aspects of segregation within our society and this includes the provision of education. The Department of Education has a statutory duty to encourage and facilitate the development of integrated education.

However, promoting good relations is not just the responsibility of the integrated education sector and schools outside this sector have also a key role to play.

Education is one of a range of issues of segregation addressed in the draft programme of Cohesion, Sharing and Integration and it will be considered as part of the current consultation process. A specific sectoral consultation meeting will be undertaken with educationalists as part of the consultation process.

City of Culture 2013 in Derry

Mr R McCartney asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether they have identified any funding from their Department's budget to be allocated to the City of Culture 2013 in Derry; and if so,

how much and for what specific purpose, projects or programmes in the City of Culture is this money intended.

(AQW 1140/11)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: We are delighted that Derry/Londonderry has been awarded the title of UK City of Culture 2013. Along with Executive colleagues, we provided letters of support for the bid.

Derry City Council will be taking forward the delivery of the City of Culture 2013 in partnership with the Ilex urban regeneration company. Ilex have identified several projects which actively support the investment in the City of Culture 2013, including an investment of £5,000,000 this year in the development of the parade ground at Ebrington, and over £500,000 on the Regeneration Plan, early scoping work in support of an Ebrington feature within the proposed Maritime Museum and conceptual architectural drawings for an art gallery.

The funding available for future years is dependent on the outcomes of the forthcoming Budget 2010 Comprehensive Spending Review.

Comprehensive Spending Review

Ms M Ritchie asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what undertakings were given by the Chancellor of the Exchequer regarding special funding arrangements for Northern Ireland as part of the block grant allocation in the forthcoming Comprehensive Spending Review.

(AQW 1148/11)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: At a meeting held on 28 September 2010, the Chancellor of the Exchequer indicated that he was prepared to consider some flexibility with regard to capital expenditure, to include the possibility of re-profiling, end year flexibility access, and sharing annual management expenditure savings. The Executive was invited to submit proposals on this for him to consider.

The Chancellor also understood the position with regard to the Presbyterian Mutual Society and underscored support that has been provided by the Prime Minister, the Secretary of State and HM Treasury for finding a workable and speedy solution, ideally before the budget announcement on 20 October 2010.

Defending Litigation Cases

Mr P Weir asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what the legal costs were to their Department of defending litigation cases in each of the last three years.

(AQW 1160/11)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: The legal costs incurred by our department defending litigation cases in each of the last three financial years are set out in the table below.

Year	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10
Amount (£)	205,764.20	182,027.14	218,215.24

Washington Investment Conference

Ms S Ramsey asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on plans for the forthcoming economic investment conference in Washington.

(AQO 246/11)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: The Economic Investment Conference will take place in Washington DC on 19 October 2010 and will be hosted by US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton and the US Special Economic Envoy, Declan Kelly.

The Economic Conference will provide a unique forum to showcase all that we have to offer to a select, highly targeted group of US companies. The US State Department is the lead organising body for the event.

It is aimed at a small number of very senior executives in American companies that have not yet made investments here. They will join an equally small number of Chief Executive Officers and senior representatives from existing US investors. This latter group will talk about the business opportunity here by using examples of their own positive experience of setting up their operations.

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Capacity Building Programme

Mr A Bresland asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the progress made in implementing the Capacity Building programme, aimed at Protestant communities in border areas.
(AQW 902/11)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms M Gildernew): The funding for this initiative along with that for all other programmes is presently being assessed under 'Budget 2010' spending review. Therefore I am unable commit to any spend until I am sure that funding will be available, hence the reason for the delay in launching the programme.

Capacity Building Programme for Rural Protestant Communities in Border Areas

Mr A Bresland asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many applications have been received to date in each of the target areas under the Capacity Building Programme for Rural Protestant Communities in Border areas.
(AQW 904/11)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The funding for this initiative along with that for all other programmes is presently being assessed under 'Budget 2010' spending review. Therefore I am unable commit to any spend until I am sure that funding will be available, and hence no calls for applications have issued.

Commercial Shellfishing in Belfast Lough

Mr D Hilditch asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the current levels of commercial shellfishing in Belfast Lough; and the impact this is having on shellfish stocks in the lough.
(AQW 953/11)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: I regret that it is not possible to assess the level of commercial sea fishing for shellfish, or its impact on shellfish stocks in Belfast Lough specifically. Data is collected for a wider area (ICES Rectangle 38E4) covering a significant area of the Irish Sea to the 55°N line.

There is a need to improve our knowledge of key inshore sea fish and shellfish species and the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute is currently preparing an inshore fisheries research strategy to address this. This will form part of a draft Inshore Fisheries Development Strategy which will be published for public consultation in March 2011.

An experimental wild cockle fishery took place within the Lough in 2008 and 2009. In 2008, two vessels landed a total of 128 tonnes of cockles, while in 2009, 13 vessels landed in total just under 71 tonnes. In both years impact on other fisheries in the Lough was limited by restricting the number of vessels operating at any one time to two vessels. An assessment of the experimental fishery showed that there was no impact on other shellfisheries in Belfast Lough.

Belfast Lough also supports a significant farmed shellfish industry, producing bottom grown mussels. Up to 12 mussel dredgers can be involved in servicing 32 licensed sites, including the relaying of seed and the harvesting of mature mussels. The production of farmed mussels from the Lough from 2004 to 2008 averaged around 3150 tonnes annually.

My Department commissioned the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) to develop ecosystem carrying capacity models (the SMILE project) to help underpin the sustainable development of shellfish aquaculture in local sea loughs. Although work on the investigation of the carrying capacity of Belfast Lough is not yet complete, there is no indication that shellfish aquaculture is having an adverse impact.

Neighbourhood Renewal

Ms J McCann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the services currently funded, fully or partly, by her Department under Neighbourhood Renewal in the West Belfast constituency.

(AQW 1066/11)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: West Belfast is an urban area and projects based within this area are not eligible for support under the Axis 3 measures of the NI Rural Development Programme (NIRDP).

Management of Fishing Matters

Mr D Kinahan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how regulations in other Departments impact on the management of fishing matters by her Department.

(AQW 1082/11)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Regulations made by other Departments place an obligation on my Department to ensure that the management of fishing and aquaculture activity is compliant with the provisions of those regulations. This would include for example regulations to protect the environment or public health.

My Department's responsibility for sea fishing also extends beyond our Territorial Sea into part of the Irish Sea offshore area, and therefore some regulations imposed by British Departments, that apply to the offshore Irish Sea, may also impact on my Department's management of fisheries.

Where regulations transpose European Regulations or Directives, my Department can be named along with other local Departments as a competent authority with obligations to comply with the requirements of the European legislation. An example is the Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc.) Regulations (NI) 1995 introduced by the Department of the Environment, which transpose the Habitats and Birds Directives. Under this legislation, the Departments must assess the activities that it permits to ensure that those activities do not cause a significant impact on the designated environmental conservation features. Where there is a risk of a significant impact from fishing or aquaculture activity, my Department must act to modify, restrict or prohibit that activity so that the risk is eliminated.

Another example is the future licensing of marine renewable energy sites by the Department of Enterprise Trade and Investment (DETI). My Department and other affected Departments are currently working with DETI to ensure that the impact of any proposals on established activities are reduced as far possible. It is likely that some restrictions will apply to the type and level of fishing that takes place close to marine renewable energy installations.

Where British Departments introduce regulations that affect devolved responsibilities the consent of the Executive will be required. An example is the development by the Department of the Environment Food and Rural Affairs of proposals for marine conservation zones in the offshore Irish Sea. Zones may be proposed in the area for which my Department has fisheries responsibility. A report proposing zones and management measures is expected by June 2011 and a consultation will be held before final decisions are taken. Potential impacts on our fisheries cannot be assessed until detailed management proposals are brought forward. Any proposals for management measures in the area for which we have devolved fishing responsibility will require the Executive's consent.

In future it is likely that the DOE will also propose such zones for the inshore environment and because of the cross Departmental impacts of such proposals Executive consent again would be required.

The above examples cover the main areas of impact on fisheries management at present.

Ulster Camogie Council

Mr D Kennedy asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether any independent scrutiny or investigation has been undertaken at the request or behest of her Department into the financial affairs of the Ulster Camogie Council; and when she expects to be in a position to report on these findings.

(AQW 1154/11)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The involvement of DARD Central Investigation Service (CIS) in an issue relating to the Ulster Camogie Council has been on the basis of an agreed Service Level Agreement where the services and expertise of CIS are made available to DCAL for issues that may arise requiring investigative advice or action. Any investigation into allegations made about funding to UCC, the outcome of such an investigation, the detail of any report, outcomes, recommendations and lessons learned are a matter for the DCAL Minister.

Loughs Agency

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development when she intends to initiate an investigation into allegations of fraud in the Loughs Agency.

(AQO 357/11)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: I am aware that a letter was recently circulated to members of the Committee that, amongst various other things, contained an allegation that there is evidence of "fraud in relation to the Loughs Agency and their dealings."

I am also aware that there was no evidence of fraud attached to the letter, and indeed that there was no further detail in the letter about what the alleged fraud relates to.

Both my Department and the Loughs Agency operate a zero-tolerance policy with regard to fraud. All potential frauds are thoroughly investigated with the aim of establishing the facts, and all necessary action will be taken if fraud is found to have occurred. Indeed, following accusations from a former employee, one such investigation is currently being conducted by the Department's Internal Audit team. However, I must emphasise that no evidence, nor indeed indication of what the alleged fraud relates to, has been received from this recent correspondent.

Forest Parks: Caravans

Mr J Wells asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what steps the Forestry Service is taking to improve security for caravan users visiting Tollymore and Castlewellan Forest Parks.

(AQO 362/11)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The vast majority of visitors to Forest Service caravan and camping sites enjoy a trouble free stay, but I acknowledge that visitors to the Tollymore and Castlewellan sites have experienced some problems caused by anti-social behaviour. In seeking to address this problem, Forest Service is exploring a range of measures to help prevent unauthorised vehicular access to these sites and to provide some form of night time security, during peak periods. No decisions have been taken on these possibilities, but officials are currently examining a number of options and association costs.

You will also be aware that, in July 2009, I launched a Recreation and Social Use strategy for our forests. This document set out five Implementation Areas and associated Targets, including a commitment to develop new operating arrangements for camping and caravanning and forest leisure facilities.

Following publication of the strategy document, Forest Service has been developing a Commercialisation Plan and, through this process, it is intended to secure a suitably qualified operating partner who will deliver improved camping and caravanning facilities at key locations in Forest Service woodlands.

In the meantime, Forest Service will continue to manage its caravan and camping sites, seeking to reduce anti-social behaviour, as far as possible. Forest Service is an active member of the Safer Mourne Partnership and will continue to use this forum to help promote community safety in the Mourne area.

Tuberculosis: Biosecurity

Ms M Ritchie asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the selection process under which farmers in Co.Down can participate in her Department's tuberculosis bio-security study. **(AQO 363/11)**

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The key aim of the TB Biosecurity Study (TBS) is to compare farm characteristics in herds that have recently had a TB breakdown with those that have had no recent history of a breakdown in a TB high incidence area, which is why the Study will take place in County Down. As it is not possible to survey and interview all farmers, a representative sample of County Down farmers will be randomly selected and invited to take part in the TBS.

For the purposes of the study, herds with recent TB infection have been defined as those that have either had at least one animal with confirmed TB infection and / or more than one TB skin test reactor since January 2009. Herds with no recent breakdown are those that have had no evidence of TB infection in the period since January 2007.

Herds from these categories have been group matched on the basis of herd size and have been selected at random from the Animal and Public Health Information System (APHIS), taking into account the herd size and area location of farms.

Invitation letters have already started to issue to those farmers that have been randomly selected, and this will continue to occur over the coming months.

Bovine TB is a complex disease and it continues to be one of the most costly animal health problems we are facing. The cost to government of controlling this disease is currently over £22 million annually and there are additional costs to farmers.

This TB Biosecurity Study is important as it is vital to get a better understanding of the factors that influence the transmission of bovine TB here. Consideration of selected cattle and wildlife factors will be key elements of this research project. The farmers selected to participate in the Study will be asked a series of questions by a researcher about their farm business as well as about evidence of badger presence and activity on their land and around their farm buildings. A survey of on-farm buildings and a farm boundary survey will also be carried out. In addition, there will be some badger sett survey work on and around participating farms. There will be no interference with badgers or their setts during the Study. The Study findings should enable us to provide better advice to farmers and to take actions that may lead to a reduction in the level of TB here.

I would encourage all farmers to take part in this important Study: indeed the TBS can not proceed without their help. I should therefore be grateful for your support in encouraging those farmers randomly selected to participate in the TB Biosecurity Study to commit to do so.

Supermarkets

Rev Dr R Coulter asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she has had any discussions with DEFRA regarding the appointment of a supermarket tsar. **(AQO 365/11)**

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: In answering this question I am assuming that the term supermarket tsar is a reference to the British Government's recent announcement to establish a Grocery Code Adjudicator. I have had no discussions with Defra in relation to such an appointment as

this is a reserved matter and therefore not within my remit. Also competition matters both in Britain and here are the responsibility of the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills and the Office of Fair Trading. I do, however, agree with the concept of fair pricing and I welcome the British Government's decision to proceed to establish a Grocery Code Adjudicator within the Office of Fair Trading. I believe that all links in the food chain are dependent on each other and that it is important for retailers to recognise that in the long run it is in their interests, and their customers' interests, to have a sustainable local based supply chain

Biofuels

Dr A McDonnell asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the potential benefits of growing bio-fuel crops, such as Miscanthus and Paulownia.
(AQO 366/11)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: DARD funded research carried out by AFBI has demonstrated that Miscanthus is a biomass crop which can grow well locally, particularly, in the drier more arable parts of the country. Annual yields are likely to be similar to, or even greater than from other biomass crops such as SRC willow. Miscanthus does not require the use of fertilizer and estimates by the EU indicate potential greenhouse gas savings of up to 80% when miscanthus is used to generate heat or electricity as opposed to fossil fuel generated heat and electricity. In England the market for miscanthus is mainly co-firing in large power stations. However, there is limited opportunity here. The potential for the growing of miscanthus locally may therefore depend on the development of a market through the installation of medium scale (100 kW to 1000kW) boilers capable of utilizing miscanthus for heat generation.

Paulownia is a fast growing tree species originating in China and has been identified by AFBI as having potential as a biomass crop. Preliminary trials at 4 local sites involving both AFBI and CAFRE are at a very early stage. The trials hope to establish if Paulownia could be an alternative to SRC as a coppiced crop. The performance of Paulownia is also being compared with other short rotation forestry species, Eucalyptus and Poplar. Paulownia is being grown as a biomass crop in Spain and Eastern Europe, however, it is too early in the trials to form a view of its potential locally.

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

Irish Football Association

Mr D O'Loan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on the progress made in relation to the management and governance issues associated with the Irish Football Association.
(AQW 932/11)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr N McCausland): I have made clear the importance I attach to the Irish Football Association regaining the confidence of government, those engaged in local football and the wider community.

The IFA have had discussions with senior officials within my department and with representatives from Sport Northern Ireland about the fundamental review of the Association. The IFA are taking actions to ensure that the structures and governance of the organisation are fit-for-purpose. This will involve a radical, independent review of its structures and governance arrangements.

The IFA are currently drafting the Terms of Reference for the review and are establishing a panel to take the review forward. While I do not have a date for completion of the review, I have impressed upon the IFA the need to take this forward as a matter of urgency.

Elite Facilities Programme

Mr P Givan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what is the current position on the Elite Facilities Programme in relation to making decisions on proposed projects, particularly projects in the Lagan Valley constituency.

(AQW 983/11)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The Major Sports Infrastructure Programme (formerly the Elite Facilities Programme) is at the final stage of the competition process, which requires the production of an outline business case and procurement strategy. The cases are currently being assessed by my Department to ensure that they meet the required value for money considerations and have achieved the standards required by the HMT Green Book for Economic Appraisals. When the approval process has been completed the Department will have to give careful consideration to the affordability of these projects within the current financial environment and competing demands.

The projects being assessed at stage 3, which include two projects from the Lagan Valley constituency, are as follows:

Facility	Location	Applicant
Sailing	Ballyholme	Ballyholme Yacht Club
Velodrome	Newcastle	Down District Council
Basketball/Volleyball	Lisburn	Lisburn City Council
Tennis	Hillsborough	Wilmar Leisure Ltd
Indoor Athletics	Antrim	Antrim Borough Council

It is important that Northern Ireland has first class sporting facilities which everyone can enjoy and benefit from. Progression to stage 3 of the competition process is evidence that we are moving in the right direction to achieve our aim.

Neighbourhood Renewal

Ms J McCann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the services currently funded, fully or partly, by his Department under Neighbourhood Renewal in the West Belfast constituency.

(AQW 1065/11)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: While my Department does not fund any services under Neighbourhood Renewal it contributes, through its associated arms length bodies, to community development and improvement in areas designated as Neighbourhood Renewal Areas (NRAs) including those within the West Belfast constituency. For example:

- the Arts Council of Northern Ireland has provided funding through the Re-Imaging Communities Programme to 11 projects in West Belfast; and
- Sport NI's Active Communities (2010-2014) is an investment programme that seeks to increase participation in sport and physical recreation through the creation, employment and deployment of a network of coaches and leaders throughout Northern Ireland. In particular, Active Communities will target under represented groups including women and girls, people with a disability and older people. Sport NI has invested £2.67m to develop Active Communities in Belfast.

Special Olympics Ulster

Ms M Ritchie asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, in light of his initial rejection of Special Olympics Ulster's business case on the grounds of affordability, what discussions he has had with his Executive colleagues in relation to the provision of cross-departmental funding for Special Olympics Ulster.

(AQW 1084/11)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I have not rejected the business case for core funding of Special Olympics Ulster. It has been assessed by my Department's economists as meeting the technical requirements of appraisal. However, consideration of approval of the business case requires the question of affordability to be dealt with.

To that end, I wrote to Ministerial colleagues in OFMDFM, DE, DHSSPS and DSD on 31 August asking that, together with DCAL, their departments make equal contribution towards the cost of funding Special Olympics Ulster over 4 years.

The question of affordability of the business case can only be fully assessed once I have received responses from all relevant Ministerial colleagues, at which time I will consider holding a meeting with them.

Translation of Departmental Papers

Mr A Bresland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much his Department spent on the translation of departmental papers into (i) Irish; and (ii) Ulster-Scots in (a) 2007/08; (b) 2008/09; and (c) 2009/10.

(AQW 1087/11)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The table below shows the amount spent by the Department of Culture Arts and Leisure on departmental papers translated into Irish and Ulster-Scots for the 2007/08, 2008/09 and 2009/10 financial years.

	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
Irish	£1039.93	£665.47	£2232.82
Ulster-Scots	£0.00	£0.00	£364.35

Fisheries Protection Officers

Mr D Kinahan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how he plans to increase the number of fisheries protection officers who are trained to carry out inspections.

(AQW 1100/11)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: 9 Fisheries Protection Officer's transferred from the Fisheries Conservancy Board to DCAL in June 2009. 2 additional Fisheries Officers were recruited by Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) for loan to DCAL at that time. These 11 staff work in 4 teams across the DCAL area. Each team reports directly to a Senior Fisheries Officer (SFO). These SFO's are supported by the Deputy Chief Fisheries Officer and Chief Fisheries Officer, also on loan from DARD. Fisheries Protection Officers have been undertaking a programme of training since transfer which is and will remain ongoing. Part of the role of an administrative team of 5 in Portadown, supported by management in Belfast, is to process detections for prosecution.

DCAL support the appointment of angling club members as Private Water Bailiffs. This gives them powers akin to Fisheries Protection Officers on their own waters. Enforcement managers have sought to build relationships with Private Water Bailiffs, through the Ulster Angling Federation, and indeed with the PSNI, to maximise and coordinate the enforcement effort. This has included the delivery of regional seminars to angling clubs when a guidance leaflet on the tools available to Private Water Bailiffs and their role and responsibilities was issued. This guidance has recently been issued to the PSNI Wildlife Liaison Officer for distribution to her colleagues. In this way all the interested parties are fully aware of the roles played by DCAL and the PSNI. It also ensures that there is an integrated co-ordinated approach to tackling poaching problems.

The need for additional Fisheries Protection Officer staff will remain under review as the above arrangements bed in. This will have to be assessed in the context of the budget 2010 settlement.

Childcare Provision

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail (i) his Department's criteria for any funding of childcare provision; and (ii) how much his Department has invested in childcare provision in each of the last three years, including Sure Start programmes.

(AQW 1108/11)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: My department does not provide direct funding for childcare provision so there is no requirement for departmental funding criteria.

Defending Litigation Cases

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what the legal costs were to his Department of defending litigation cases in each of the last three years.

(AQW 1159/11)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: In each of the last three financial years, the Department incurred the following legal costs in defending litigation cases:

2007-08	2008-09	2009-10
£14,205	£3,742	£156,248

The reported costs take account of all legal costs incurred by the Department in defending litigation cases from the issue of proceedings through to outlay paid to other parties to the litigation either as a result of the terms of settlement agreements or Orders of the Court.

Schedule to the Safety of Sports Grounds (Designation) (No.2) Order (Northern Ireland) 2009

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the official capacity of each of the sports grounds identified in the Schedule to the Safety of Sports Grounds (Designation) (No.2) Order (Northern Ireland) 2009; and to outline any reduction in (i) terraced; and (ii) seated capacity from previous figures stated.

(AQW 1178/11)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The table below details the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure's (DCAL) official estimated capacity (ie number of spectators for which a sports ground has accommodation) of each of the sports grounds identified in the Schedule to the Safety of Sports Grounds (Designation) (No.2) Order (Northern Ireland) 2009. This official estimated capacity has not been changed or reduced since inspections were carried out in 2009 by Sport Northern Ireland (SNI) on DCAL's behalf and in accordance with Article 4(4) of The Safety of Sports Grounds (Northern Ireland) Order 2006.

I am aware, however, that as a result of the introduction of the Safety of Sports Grounds (Designation) (No.2) Order (Northern Ireland) 2009, 17 of the grounds listed in its Schedule have, to date, been issued with safety certificates by their District Council under Article 4 (5) and Article 5 of the Safety of Sports Grounds (Northern Ireland) Order 2006. These certificates specify, subject to certain conditions being satisfied, the number of spectators that the owners of the venues in question may safely admit into the grounds including into terraced and seated accommodation. Information on the numbers of spectators that Councils have determined may be safely admitted at present into these areas is also set out in the table below.

Club	Estimated official capacity	Estimated safe capacity as determined by district council	Estimated safe capacity: terraced accommodation	Estimated safe capacity: seated accommodation
Association Football				
Ballyclare Comrades	5,333	1,800	1,262	538
Ballymena United FC	8,426	1,418 ¹	-	1,418
Cliftonville FC	6,224	2,180	302	1,878
Coleraine FC	13,132	2,496	1,390	1,106
Crusaders FC	5,473	1,977	1,314	663
Donegall Celtic	8,283	2,254	1,479	988
Glentoran FC	26,556	5,056	1,065	3,991
Linfield FC	24,734	12,342 (for domestic games); 15,602 (with temporary seating for internationals)	-	12,342 (for domestic games); 15,602 (with temporary seating for internationals)
Newry City FC	7,949	2,275	1478	797
Portadown FC	5,804	2,227	-	2,227
Gaelic Games – County Grounds				
Co Antrim GAA	32,282	31,661	24,699	6,962
Co Fermanagh GAA	17,202	14,602	8,470	6,132
Secondary Grounds				
Dungannon GAC	12,969	3,945	3,945	-
Irvinestown GAC	27,084	1,880	1,880	-
Owenbeg Complex	5,046	300	300	-
St John's GAC	8,508	865	502	363
Rugby				
Ulster Rugby, Ravenhill	10,541 ²	11,951	7,934	4,017

- 1 The District Council's estimation of the safe capacity at Ballymena UTD FC is expected to be increased to 3,050 when the Warden St stand opens shortly
- 2 This estimate was made in 2009 when part of Ravenhill Rugby Ground was under reconstruction and certain areas, under construction, had no accommodation (accessible or otherwise) for spectators. The safety certificate issued by Belfast City Council in 2010 post dates this estimate and the completion of these construction works.

It should be noted that SNI, which is responsible for discharging overseeing functions under paragraph 5 of the Explanatory Memorandum to The Safety of Sports Grounds (Northern Ireland) Order 2006, is carrying out assessments of all safety certificates issued by District Councils. Part of the purpose of these assessments is to enable SNI to evaluate the remedial actions, in terms of physical safety and safety management, ground owners may need to take to increase the number of spectators that they may safely admit into their grounds in line with their actual attendance demands.

Overpayment to Contractors

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (i) whether his Department has made any overpayments to contractors in each of the last five years; and if so to detail (ii) the goods or services which were overpaid; (iii) the projects to which the overpayments related; (iv) the value of the overpayments; and (v) whether the overpayments were successfully reclaimed from the companies or individuals overpaid.

(AQW 1276/11)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Information relating to overpayments to contractors in the financial years 2005-06 to 2009-10 inclusive is not readily available from the Department's financial systems. The extraction of this information would require extensive manual analysis of financial records from this period and would result in disproportionate costs.

Odyssey Arena's Operator

Mr P Maskey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline the role of the Odyssey Arena's Operator from December 2010, including the name of the person who will be in this post; and to outline any concerns he has about the future of the arena.

(AQW 1279/11)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The Odyssey Trust Company Ltd is run as a Charitable Trust, established to build and then operate the various elements of the Odyssey. The appointment of an operator for the Arena is a matter for the Odyssey Trust Company Ltd.

My Department is however kept fully apprised of developments concerning the Odyssey Trust Company Ltd's plans for the future management of the Arena.

Capital Build Strategy

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (i) what organisations and individuals were on the circulation list when the capital build/spend strategy was distributed; (ii) who received a copy; and (iii) when they received their copy.

(AQW 1304/11)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: ISNI 3, which will be the Department's capital build/spend strategy, has yet to be agreed as the budget process for 2011/12 to 2014/2015 is still at a relatively early stage.

Treasury will announce on 20th October the budget allocation for Northern Ireland.

Following this the Executive will have to decide the budget allocation for each Department.

It will not be until the Departmental capital budget is known that the capital build/spend strategy will be agreed and therefore available for distribution.

Department of Education

Private Transport of Statemented Children

Mrs M O'Neill asked the Minister of Education to outline the tendering process for the private transport of statemented children by the Southern Education and Library Board.

(AQW 476/11)

Minister of Education (Ms C Ruane): Dúirt Bord Oideachais agus Leabharlann an Deiscirt liom go lorgaítear tairiscintí de réir Buanorduithe Boird, de réir Threoracha Soláthair an AE, agus de réir Rialúcháin Rialtais eile. Dúirt siad go gcuirtear fógraí i dTuairisc Oifigiúil na gComhphobal Eorpach (i gcásanna ina dtéann luach na tairisceana thar teorainn de £156k atá cinntithe ag an CE), sa Belfast Telegraph agus ar shuíomh gréasáin an Bhoird.

The Southern Education and Library Board tell me that tenders are sought in accordance with Board Standing Orders, EU Procurement Directives and other Government Regulations. They say advertisements are placed in the Official Journal of the European Communities (where the value of the tender exceeds the EC-determined limit of £156k), in the Belfast Telegraph and on the Board website.

They say upon receipt, tenders are evaluated in accordance with criteria based on capability and value contained in the tender documentation. Tenderers' documentation such as vehicle licencing, insurance and driver licencing are fully checked and verified. They say a list of fully compliant taxi operators is produced with a sufficient number of operators being accepted in each geographical area of the Board to meet expected requirements.

I previously wrote to the Chair of the North-Eastern Education and Library Board on 11 April 2008 copied to the Chairs of the other Boards, expressing my concerns at the Boards' practice of advertising, mainly in the Belfast Telegraph.

I drew attention to a survey conducted in 2007 which suggested that the Belfast Telegraph is read by only 12% of the Catholic population. I also drew attention to the views of the Commissioner for Public Appointments (in giving evidence to the OFMDFM Scrutiny Committee) that she did not think it sufficient for jobs to be advertised only in the Belfast Telegraph. Therefore, in using the Belfast Telegraph only, I reiterated my concerns that Boards may not be meeting their statutory duties in relation to providing equality to all.

In my letter I asked the Boards to review their existing procedures and to consider addressing the imbalance through the use of the Irish News in addition to the Belfast Telegraph.

I have again written to the Boards asking them to provide me with details of the outcome of their Board's consideration of advertising practice

Transport to Special Schools

Mr M Durkan asked the Minister of Education to detail the criteria used to determine whether a child is transported to a special school by taxi; and the costs incurred by each Education and Library Board for this service, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 510/11)

Minister of Education: I have been advised by the Education and Library Boards that pupils are only transported by taxi where;

- the child has specific needs (behavioural or medical) which deem bus transport unsuitable usually within a statement for special education needs;
- specialist pupil conditions apply, for example sensory sensitivity or autism, which may require individual or small group transport;
- when all space has been utilised on Board buses;
- where no Board or private vehicles operate to certain special schools; and

- where times allocated by the schools are outside of normal school times and there are no Board buses available.

Tá na costais a thabhaigh gach Bord Oideachais agus Leabharlann i leith daltaí a iompar i dtacsaithe ar scoileanna speisialta, i ngach bliain de na trí bliana deireanacha dona bhfuil figiúirí ar fáil, mar atá soláthraithe sa tábla thíos. Níl na figiúirí don bhliain 2009-10 ar fáil go fóill;

The costs incurred by each Education and Library Board to transport pupils to special schools by taxi, in each of the last three years for which figures are available is as provided in the table below. The figures for 2009-10 are not yet available;

Financial Year	Belfast k	North Eastern k	South Eastern k	Southern k	Western k
2006-07	447	1,129	1,546	1,511	121
2007-08	531	978	542	249	110
2008-09	623	458	464	306	153

Figures in £000s

The Education and Library's policy states that "escorts are provided, where required, to ensure the safety of children on the recommendation of the Designated Special Education Officer".

As a contractual requirement, all private hire contractors must only supply personnel who have been Access NI checked.

All escorts when present and drivers are also subject to an enhanced Access NI criminal record check.

Physical Education

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Education (i) if her Department has issued guidance to primary schools indicating the preferred amount of time to be set aside for physical education; and (ii) whether her Department has sought information from primary schools, either directly or indirectly, in relation to the amount of time currently set aside for physical education at Key Stage One and Key Stage Two.

(AQW 952/11)

Minister of Education:

- Eisíodh an Roinn Oideachais treoir sa bhliain 2003 inar mhol sí do scoileanna ar a laghad dhá uair de chorpoidéachas in aghaidh na seachtaine a thairiscint. Tá an treoir sin, atá i bhfeidhm go fóill, ar fáil ar shuíomh gréasáin na Roinne.
- Yes. The Department of Education issued guidance in 2003 encouraging schools to offer at least two hours of physical education per week. That guidance, which remains current, is available on the Department's website.
- The Department receives reports from the Education and Training Inspectorate about the delivery of all aspects of the revised curriculum including PE. Additionally, the Department has recently had sight of Sport NI's report into timetabled PE in primary schools which was responded to by 48% of primary schools here. I am aware that the findings of this survey indicate that the overall average time allocated to curricular PE in primary schools in the north of Ireland during the 2008-09 academic year was 89 minutes.

In 2007/08, I introduced my curriculum sports programme which aims to develop the physical literacy skills of our youngest pupils and enhance school provision of the recommended 2 hours of physical activity within the curriculum. In the current school year there are 59 coaches delivering this programme in over 520 schools.

I have considered very carefully the arguments made in favour of setting aside a minimum amount of time for PE within the curriculum. Leaving aside the fact that legislation currently precludes this, I

believe that it is much more effective to focus on the quality of PE and not on the quantity. I am of the firm belief that it is the quality of PE provision – and the level of engagement and enjoyment that pupils experience during PE classes – that will encourage young people to remain physically active throughout their lives, not the precise number of hours or minutes devoted to it as a subject.

Hydrotherapy Pool at Roddensvale Special School in Larne

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of Education for an update on the provision of a hydrotherapy pool at Roddensvale Special School in Larne.

(AQW 1022/11)

Minister of Education: Chuir Bord Oideachais agus Leabharlann an Oirthuaiscirt (BOLOT) in iúl don Roinn nach bhfuil sé in ann an tionscadal seo a mhaoiniú mar gheall ar bhrúnna ar a bhuiséad caipitil don bhliain 2010/11.

The North Eastern Education and Library Board (NEELB) has informed the Department that due to pressures on the capital budget in 2010/11 it is not in a position to fund this project.

I will continue to lobby for more capital funding to bring the schools estate up to an acceptable level and make provision for special projects such as this.

Funding Schemes

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Education what grants or funding schemes are available from her Department, or its arms-length bodies, to assist with projects undertaken by (i) groups for people with disabilities; or (ii) residential care facilities which cater for people with disabilities.

(AQW 1077/11)

Minister of Education: Ní sholáthraíonn mo Roinn deontais ná scéimeanna cistithe díreach do ghrúpaí chun cabhrú le tionscadail do pháistí a bhfuil míchumas acu. Soláthraítear cistí sainithe agus an leithdháileadh bliantúil blocdheontais do na Boird Oideachais agus Leabharlann agus soláthraítear cistiú díreach do scoileanna chun a chinntiú go mbíonn rochtain chothrom ag gach páiste a bhfuil míchumas acu agus ag gach páiste nach bhfuil míchumas acu ar gach gné de shaol na scoile agus go nglacann siad páirt iomlán iontu.

My department does not provide grants or funding schemes directly to groups to assist with projects for children with a disability. It does, however, provide ear-marked funds and the annual block grant allocation to the Education and Library Boards (ELBs) and funding directly to schools to enable every pupil with or without a disability to participate fully and have equal access to all aspects of school life.

The ELBs also provide support to groups of people with disabilities through:

- The Extended Schools Programme
- Youth Service Schemes of assistance

As Minister for Education, I and my Department have set out the vision for education, which has at its core, a commitment to equality and fairness and a determination to make sure that all of our young people have the same opportunity to succeed and to reach their potential.

Integrated School Places

Mr T Lunn asked the Minister of Education whether her Department will continue to meet its commitment to ensure that places will be available in integrated schools for all parents who request them for their children.

(AQW 1094/11)

Minister of Education: Fanaim tiomanta, agus leanfaidh mé de bheith tiomanta, don dualgas reachtúil a cuireadh orm agus ar mo Roinn chun forbairt an oideachais imeasctha a éascú agus a spreagadh.

I remain, and will continue to be committed to the statutory duty placed upon me and my Department to encourage and facilitate the development of integrated education.

Where pressure on places exists at a school, the Department will consider any request from a school for a temporary increase in intake figures. All cases are considered on their merits.

Integrated School Places

Mr T Lunn asked the Minister of Education how many pupils whose parents applied for a place in an integrated school for the 2009/10 and 2010/11 academic years were (i) denied a place; or (ii) denied a place in their school of choice but were offered a place in another school.

(AQW 1095/11)

Minister of Education:

- (i) Níl an t-eolas a iarradh ar fáil ach i dtaca le hiarratais phríomhrogha. Chuir na Boird Oideachais agus Leabharlann in iúl gur:
- (i) The information requested is only available in relation to first preference applications. The Education and Library Boards have advised that:
 - in the 2009/10 school year 3166 children made 1st preference applications to Integrated Schools, 496 were not accepted into their first preference choice; and
 - in the 2010/11 school year 3347 children made 1st preference applications to Integrated Schools, 499 were not accepted into their first preference choice.
- (ii) All children unsuccessful in obtaining a place at their 1st preference choice will subsequently have been offered and accepted a school place in line with their preferences. Some of these preferences may have resulted in admission to an integrated school.

Draft Early Years (0-6) Strategy

Ms A Lo asked the Minister of Education how she intends to consult children and young people on the Draft Early Years (0-6) Strategy.

(AQW 1097/11)

Minister of Education: Tá mo Roinn ag córadh a pleananna faoi láthair ar dhul go díreach i gcomhairle le páistí agus le daoine óga ar dhóigh iomchuí maidir le dréachtStraitéis na Luathbhlianta (0-6).

My Department is currently considering its plans in relation to consulting directly with children and young people in an appropriate manner in respect of the draft Early Years (0-6) Strategy.

The public consultation was launched on 25 June 2010 and ends on 30 November 2010. Responses can be made in writing or on line and appropriate documents for this purpose are available on the Department of Education's website and in hard copy from the Department's Early Years Team.

In addition, Department officials have undertaken a series of public events to gather views and comments on the draft Strategy. Nine events were organised as follows:

Date	Venue
Tuesday 21 September	Ardhowen Theatre, Enniskillen.
Thursday 23 September	Malone House, Harberton Room, Belfast.
Tuesday 28 September	Belmont Hotel, Banbridge.
Thursday 30 September	City of Derry Hotel, Derry.
Tuesday 5 October	Market Place Theatre, Armagh.
Thursday 7 October	Greenmount Campus, Boyd Hall Conference Hall, Antrim.

Date	Venue
Tuesday 12 October	Grosvenor Hall, Belfast.
Thursday 14 October	The Lodge Hotel, Coleraine.
Wednesday 20 October	Silverbirch Hotel, Omagh.

City of Culture 2013 in Derry

Mr R McCartney asked the Minister of Education whether she has identified any funding from her Department's budget to be allocated to the City of Culture 2013 in Derry; and if so, how much and for what specific purpose, projects or programmes in the City of Culture is this money intended.

(AQW 1176/11)

Minister of Education: Féadaim a dhearbhu nár sainithníodh, go dtí seo, aon chistiú ó bhuiséad mo Roinne atá le leithdháileadh ar Chathair an Chultúir 2012 i nDoire. Faoi láthair, níl buiséad ag aon Roinn ar bith a théann thar an bhliain airgeadais seo agus spíonfar aon iarratais ar chistiú don tionscadal seo i gcomhthéacs an Bhuiséid le haghaidh seirbhísí oideachais a chuir an Coiste Feidhmiúcháin ar fáil dom mar chuid den Bhuiséad 2010.

I can confirm that to date no funding has been identified from my Department's budget to be allocated to the City of Culture 2013 in Derry. At present, no Department has a budget beyond this financial year and any requests for funding for this project in future years will be considered in light of the budget made available to me for education services by the Executive as part of Budget 2010.

Irish-medium Schools

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Education how many pupils are currently enrolled in Irish-medium schools and how this compares with the last two academic years.

(AQW 1212/11)

Minister of Education: Tá an t-eolas a iarradh sa tábla thíos. Tá figiúirí d'aonaid lánGhaeilge

folaithe fosta.

The information requested is contained in the table below. Figures for Irish-medium units have also been included.

ENROLMENTS IN IRISH-MEDIUM SCHOOLS AND UNITS 2007/08 – 2009/10

School type	2007/08		2008/09		2009/10	
	Schools	Units	Schools	Units	Schools	Units
Voluntary and Private Pre-School Centres	466	-	436	-	435	-
Primary	2,132	614	2,217	634	2,253	681
Post primary	506	126	513	132	561	145
Total	3,104	740	3,166	766	3,249	826

Source: School census

Note:

- 1 Primary school enrolment figures include nursery, and Year 1 – 7 classes.

Classroom Assistants

Mr D Kennedy asked the Minister of Education to detail the various grades of Classroom Assistant within the Southern Education and Library Board and the number currently employed at each grade. **(AQW 1213/11)**

Minister of Education: Chuir Príomhfheidhmeannach Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlann an Deiscirt in iúl dom go raibh 1,894 Cúntóir Ranga a bhí fostaithe in 2,175 post, mar a bhí ar 19 Meán Fómhair 2010.

I have been advised by the Chief Executive of the Southern Education and Library Board that as at 19 September 2010 there were 1,894 Classroom Assistants employed in 2,175 posts.

The reason that the number of jobs exceeds the number of Classroom Assistants employed is that there are some Classroom Assistants who are employed in more than one post, generally referred to as multi-jobbers.

A breakdown of the Classroom Assistants by grade which reflects the outcome of the job evaluation exercise is as follows:-

Number of Classroom Assistant (General - J1) posts	Number of Classroom Assistant (Special Needs - J2) posts	Number of Classroom Assistant (Additional Special Needs - J3) posts
335	436	168

In addition a number of staff at the grades in operation prior to the job evaluation process had their grading protected and the breakdown is as follows:

Number of Classroom Assistant posts (Unqualified)	Number of Classroom Assistant posts (Recognised)	Number of Classroom Assistant posts (Qualified)
132	71	1033

Funded Preschool Places

Mr R Beggs asked the Minister of Education to detail, for the 2010/11 academic year, the number of children, in their immediate preschool year, who (i) received a funded preschool place; (ii) did not receive a funded preschool place initially, but received an offer of a place after the additional £1.3 million was provided; and (iii) have not yet received a preschool place, broken down by District Council area. **(AQW 1221/11)**

Minister of Education: Mionsonraítear sa tábla thíos líon na bpáistí ina mblianta deireanacha réamhscoile a raibh áit acu agus nach raibh áit acu ag deireadh an phróisis um iontrálacha réamhscoile ar 30 Aibreán i ngach ceann de na limistéir Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlann (BOL). Níl eolas atá miondealaithe de réir limistéar comhairle ceantair ar fáil go héasca.

The table below details the number of children in their final preschool year who were placed and those who were unplaced at the end of the preschool admissions process on 30 April 2010 in each of the Education and Library Board (ELB) areas. This information is not readily available broken down by District Council area.

	No. of children placed	No. of children unplaced
BELB	3082	246
WELB	3586	165
NEELB	4269	184

	No. of children placed	No. of children unplaced
SEELB	4261	308
SELB	4625	299
Total	19823	1202

On 20 May I announced additional funding of up to £1.3 million, to provide up to 1,200 more preschool places in the voluntary/private sector, in order to ensure that, where possible, every child would be offered a funded preschool place. The Pre-School Education Advisory Groups in each of the Education and Library Board areas allocated additional places to those settings in their area which had spare capacity and unplaced children seeking a funded preschool place. However as places are claimed monthly in arrears the actual uptake of these places will not be available until the September claims are received, collated and verified by each ELB.

I will write to the member with the information he has requested as soon as it becomes available.

Parkhall Integrated School, Antrim

Mr M Storey asked the Minister of Education for an update on the provision of a newbuild for Parkhall Integrated School, Antrim.

(AQW 1234/11)

Minister of Education: Folaíodh an scéim mholta le haghaidh Parkhall Integrated School san athbhreithniú le gairid ar thionscadail chaipitil agus measadh go raibh sí “go hiomlán comhlíontach”. Tá an scéim fós folaithe sa Phlean Soláthair Infheistíochta (PSI) na Roinne agus spíonfar í le haghaidh dul chun cinn, i dteannta le scéimeanna eile atá folaithe sa PSI, nuair a chuirfear cistiú ar fáil.

The proposed scheme for Parkhall Integrated School was included in the recent review of capital projects and assessed as ‘fully compliant’. The scheme remains on the Department’s Investment Delivery Plan (IPD) and will be considered for progression, together with the other schemes on the IDP, as funding becomes available.

Newbuilds for Ballymoney High School and Castletower Special School, Ballymoney

Mr M Storey asked the Minister of Education for an update on the provision of newbuilds for (i) Ballymoney High School; and (ii) Castletower Special School, Ballymoney.

(AQW 1235/11)

Minister of Education:

- (i) Measadh go bhfuil Ballymoney High School ‘go hiomlán comhlíontach’ san athbhreithniú caipitil agus tá sí fós ar Phlean Soláthair Infheistíochta an RO. Tá sí le forbairt faoi réir sócmhainní atá ar fáil agus faoi réir na bpleananna riachtanacha agus na gceaduithe riachtanacha ar fad a bheith i bhfeidhm.
- (i) Ballymoney High School has been deemed ‘fully compliant’ in the capital review and remains on the DE’s Investment Delivery Plan to be progressed subject to available resources and all necessary plans and approvals being in place.
- (ii) The proposed major capital works scheme for Castle Tower Special School is at Economic Appraisal (EA) stage.

Definition of “Social Bigotry”

Mr M Storey asked the Minister of Education to outline her Department’s definition of “social bigotry” in the context of her answer to a supplementary question to AQO 197/11 on 4 October 2010; and how this definition applies to non-denominational grammar schools and maintained grammar schools.

(AQW 1238/11)

Minister of Education: Cuidíonn úsáid na scrúduithe éalaithe i scoileanna gramadaí, cibé acu is scoil shainchreidmheach nó scoil neamh-shainchreidmheach í, leis na míchothromaíochtaí a bhí soiléir nuair a bhí an scrúdú aistrithe státturaithe in úsáid a chaomhnú.

The use of breakaway tests by grammar schools, whether denominational or non-denominational, serves to perpetuate the inequalities evident when a state sponsored transfer test was in use.

Only 6% of pupils in grammar schools are FSME (free school meal entitled) compared to 26% in non-selective schools. This illustrates that academic selection does not offer equality of access to a grammar school education.

Furthermore, in 2009/10 38% of children transferred from a primary school to a grammar school. However, only 20% of children located within a Neighbourhood Renewal Area (NRA), an area identified as having high levels of disadvantage and deprivation, transferred to a grammar school compared to 41% of children who were not located within a NRA. It is clear that if your child is resident in a NRA it is significantly less likely that he/she will be able to avail of a grammar school education.

I have no doubt that this pattern of inequality will be repeated once data from the next school census is available to describe the equivalent position for Transfer 2010 involving the use of breakaway tests. That is why I continue to urge all schools to adhere to my Department's post-primary transfer policy which has equality at its core.

Funding the Northern Ireland Commission for Catholic Education

Mr M Storey asked the Minister of Education what qualitative assessment has been made of the value for money of funding the Northern Ireland Commission for Catholic Education.

(AQW 1259/11)

Minister of Education: Chuir an Coimisiún d'Oideachas Caitliceach cás gnó le haghaidh cistithe faoi bhráid mo Roinne. Léiríonn sé seo cuspóir an Athbhreithniúcháin ar Riarachán Poiblí chun a chinntiú go bhfuil guth éifeachtach ag gach earnáil oideachais. Fuarthas cásanna gnó ó chomhlachtaí atá ag déanamh ionadaíochta d'earnálacha eile fosta, agus cuireadh grúpa oibre ar bun chun cás gnó a fhorbairt do bhunú an chomhlachta a dhéanfaidh ionadaíocht do scoileanna rialaithe.

The Commission for Catholic Education has submitted a business case for funding to my Department. This reflects the objective of the Review of Public Administration of ensuring that each education sector has an effective voice. Business cases have also been received from organisations representing other sectors and a working group has been established to develop a business case for the establishment of a body to represent controlled schools.

Consideration of the business cases is on hold in light of the delay in implementing the Review of Public Administration.

Funding

Mr M Storey asked the Minister of Education how much funding has been allocated to (i) the Northern Ireland Commission for Catholic Education; and (ii) the Catholic Council for Maintained Schools in each of the last five years.

(AQW 1261/11)

Minister of Education: Go dtí seo, níor sholáthair mo Roinn aon chistiú don Choimisiún d'Oideachas Caitliceach. Tá sonraí ar an chistiú a soláthraíodh do Chomhairle na Scoileanna Caitliceacha faoi Chothabháil tugtha thíos.

To date, my Department has not provided any funding to the Commission for Catholic Education. Details of the funding provided to the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools are given below.

Allocations to CCMS in each of the last five years are as follows:

Financial Year	2006/07 £'000	2007/08 £'000	2008/09 £'000	2009/10 £'000	2010/11 £'000
Recurrent funding (excluding Earmarked)	4,110	2,696	2,787	3,049	2,905
Earmarked funding	986	1,233	898	2,723	1,230
Capital funding*	98	98	35	30	4
Total	5,194	4,027	3,720	5,802	4,139

* Change in capitalisation policy in line with convergence for ESA has changed the amount of capital funding required in 2010-11.

Pupils Leaving Year 12 without Five GCSEs

Mr C Lyttle asked the Minister of Education how many pupils left Year 12 without five GCSEs in each of the last three years.

(AQW 1283/11)

Minister of Education: Tá an t-eolas a iarradh sa tábla thíos:

The information requested is in the table below:

Academic year	Number of Year 12 pupils not achieving 5 or more GCSEs (or equivalent) at grades A*-G	Number of pupils in Year 12
2008/09	1,794	23,183
2007/08	1,671	24,345
2006/07	2,107	24,703

Data excludes special and independent schools, and pupils with a statement of special educational needs.

Source: Summary of Annual Examination Results.

Overpayments to Contractors

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Education (i) whether her Department has made any overpayments to contractors in each of the last five years; and if so to detail (ii) the goods or services which were overpaid; (iii) the projects to which the overpayments related; (iv) the value of the overpayments; and (v) whether the overpayments were successfully reclaimed from the companies or individuals overpaid.

(AQW 1284/11)

Minister of Education: Chun an t-eolas seo a bhailiú, bheadh sé de cheangal ar gach ionad gnó laistigh den Roinn a gcuid taifead a athbhreithniú, agus bheadh costas díréireach ag baint leis seo a dhéanamh.

To extract this information would require individual business areas within the Department to review their records and to do so would result in disproportionate costs.

Transfer 2010

Mr S Moutray asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQO 204/11, what power she has to compel schools to follow her advice in relation to Transfer 2010 not to use academic selection.

(AQW 1292/11)

Minister of Education: Tá sé mínithe i dTreoir mo Roinne um Aistriú 2010 gur chóir go mbeadh “aird chuí” ag scoileanna ar na moltaí atá cuimsithe laistigh den Treoir.

My Department's Transfer 2010 Guidance explained that schools must “have regard” to the recommendations contained within the guidance.

The duty to “have regard” is a legal one which requires schools to give active and receptive consideration to the recommended admissions criteria and record this consideration.

Adherence to the guidance is the best way for schools to ensure that they are offering equality of access to their provision.

Maintenance of Schools in Upper Bann

Mr S Moutray asked the Minister of Education how much has been spent on the maintenance of schools in Upper Bann in each of the last three years.

(AQW 1294/11)

Minister of Education: Tá an caiteachas ar chothabháil ar an Bhann Uachtair mionsonraithe sna táblaí thíos:

The spend on maintenance in Upper Bann is detailed in the tables below:

2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
£2,067,060.14	£1,292,667.59	£1,025,950.56

Figures for voluntary grammar and grant maintained integrated schools are not readily available.

School Reserves

Ms D Purvis asked the Minister of Education to outline her Department's policy on the holding of school reserves and what is the current total value of all school reserves.

(AQW 1307/11)

Minister of Education: Maítear i bpolasaí mo Roinne um barrachais scoile go bhféadfar scoileanna coigiltí a thiomsú thar thréimhse roinnt blianta agus nach rachaidh an ábaltacht chun a leithéid de choigiltí a dhéanamh i bhfeidhm ar a bhfoirmle mhaoinithe i mblianta iardain. Ní mór cur i bhfeidhm coigiltí a theorannú, áfach, go míreanna caiteachais a bheadh ceadaithe faoin Scéim Choitinn Mhaoinithe.

My Department's policy on school surpluses states that schools may accumulate savings over a period of several years and the ability to make such savings will in no way affect their formula funding in subsequent years. However, the application of savings must be limited to items of expenditure that would otherwise be permitted under the Common Funding Scheme.

My Department does not wish to see excessive surpluses of public funds being accumulated by schools without good reason and schools should therefore not build up significant levels of savings unless there is a specific purpose in mind. The reasons for any build-up of surpluses and the purposes for which these funds will be used must be clearly communicated to the appropriate Funding Authority. The expectation is that any significant savings would be utilised within the timeframe of the 3-year school financial plan. In general, schools should not have accumulated surpluses in excess of 5% or £75,000, whichever is the lesser, of their delegated budget unless they are being accumulated for specific purposes and these are detailed in their plans.

The latest financial year for which the information on school surpluses is currently available is 2008/09. In the 2008/09 financial year, the total amount of Aggregated Schools Budget which was delegated to 1,191 grant-aided schools, under the Common Funding Formula, was £1,050 million and, at the end of March 2009, the total amount of cumulative surpluses held by schools was £67 million.

Equality and All-Ireland Directorate

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 572/11, how the functions of the Equality and All Ireland Directorate were carried out prior to its establishment in May 2009.

(AQW 1333/11)

Minister of Education: Roimh mhí na Bealtaine 2009, leithdháileadh feidhmeanna na Stiúrthóireachta um Chomhionannas agus na Stiúrthóireachta Uile-Éireann trasna roinnt réimsí gnó laistigh de mo Roinn. Mar chuid d'atheagrú Roinne, tugadh na feidhmeanna le chéile in aon Stiúrthóireacht amháin chun fócas níos géire a thabhairt ar phríomhthosaíochtaí.

Prior to May 2009, the functions of the Equality and All Ireland Directorate were distributed across a number of business areas within my Department. As part of a Departmental reorganisation, the functions were brought together in a single Directorate to provide a sharper focus on key priorities.

Statemented Needs

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Education how many primary school children in the Upper Bann constituency (i) are currently statemented; (ii) have had their statemented needs met; (iii) have statemented needs that have not been met, including how long they have been awaiting a solution and the reasons for the delay.

(AQW 1336/11)

Minister of Education: Chuir Príomhfheidhmeannach Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlann an Deiscirt an méid seo a leanas in iúl dom:-

I have been advised by the Chief Executive of the Southern Education and Library Board as follows:-

- (i) There are currently 401 pupils, who have a statement of special educational needs, in primary schools in the Upper Bann constituency;
- (ii) All pupils who have a statement of special educational needs have their needs met through appropriate educational placement, expertise of teachers and support from Board services;
- (iii) The Board is not aware of any child with a statement of special educational needs whose needs have not been met.

Department for Employment and Learning

Childcare Provision

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail (i) his Department's criteria for any funding of childcare provision; and (ii) how much his Department has invested in childcare provision in each of the last three years, including Sure Start programmes.

(AQW 1101/11)

Minister for Employment and Learning (Sir Reg Empey): My Department places a high priority on providing assistance to removing barriers to employment, training and education. Childcare is considered by many to be one of those barriers and for this reason the Department provides financial assistance towards the cost of childcare incurred by certain eligible participants (for example, lone parents and partners/spouses of those on health-related benefits) while on its programmes. The Department does not provide funding to Sure Start programmes but provides funding in childcare provision in other programmes.

Further Education

Funding for childcare for Further Education (FE) students is available through Care to Learn, FE Awards and Support Funds (Discretionary). Figures below are totals for each of the years:

	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	Total
Care to Learn	£149,669	£325,821	£350,751	£826,241
Fe Awards	£98,543	£212,649	£379,346	£690,538
Support Funds	£110,743	£136,735	£177,866	£425,344
Total	£358,955	£675,205	£907,963	£1,942,123

Care to Learn is open to full-time and part-time FE and HE students aged 16 - 19 who are enrolled in FE provision. Assistance is provided on the basis of actual costs of childcare up to a maximum cost of £165 per week for each child.

FE Awards are provided to full time and part time students aged 19 and over with dependent children in prescribed childcare. FE Awards pay up to 85% of actual costs up to £148.75 per week for 1 child and up to £255 per week for 2 or more children. From 2010/11, apart from Care to Learn, all FE childcare provision is provided through the FE Awards. FE Awards now pay up to 100% of the actual childcare costs up to £150 per week for 1 child and up to £255 per week for 2 or more children.

In relation to Support Funds Discretionary, the amount a student could receive for childcare is assessed on an individual basis up to a limit of £55 per week for 1st child, £30 per week for 2nd child and £25 per week for 3rd child, with a total maximum of £110 per week. In all cases students must have met the criteria as detailed in the relevant circular.

Steps to Work

At the end of September 2008, Steps to Work (StW) replaced New Deal as the Department for Employment and Learning's main adult return to work programme. Departmental spend in relation to assistance with childcare costs for those participating on New Deal/Steps to Work in each of the last three years was as follows:

	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
Steps to Work	£586,684	£584,530	£633,053

In some circumstances participants may be eligible for assistance towards the cost of childcare incurred while attending StW provision, with the exception of participants on Step Ahead. An application for assistance towards these costs can be made by a participant who is:

- A lone parent in receipt of Income Support (IS), Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA), Incapacity Benefit (IB) or Employment and Support Allowance (ESA); or
- A StW participant whose partner is also on StW provision or any other DEL programme where both are receiving either Benefit-Based Training Allowance (BBTA) or Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA); or
- A StW participant (excluding the Employer Subsidy/Step Ahead) who is the partner of someone who is in receipt of one or more of the following qualifying benefits:
 - Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA)
 - Income Support (IS)
 - Incapacity Benefit (IB)
 - Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)
 - Attendance Allowance (AA)
 - Disability Living Allowance (DLA)
 - Severe Disablement Allowance (SDA)
 - Disability or Higher Premium Pension.

The maximum daily amount of childcare assistance payable is subject to a maximum limit of £240 per week (£48 x 5 = £240) per family where the childcare is provided by a registered childminder/ nursery/ crèche or subject to a maximum limit of £100 per week (£20 x 5 = £100) per family where care is provided by a relative. The maximum amount of childcare assistance payable per family is subject to an overall limit up to £240 per week where care is provided by a mixture of registered and non-registered childcare.

Higher Education

Childcare Grant is one of three Dependants Grants Entitlements awarded by DEL. The others are Adult Dependants Grants and Parental Learners Allowance. The figures below incorporate all the Dependants Grants Entitlements - the vast majority being Childcare Grant.

	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
Higher Education	£2,176,101	£2,594,654	£2,890,326

The Childcare Grant is available for full-time higher education students who have dependent children and a low household income. This includes students who are lone parents, students with partners, and students married to other students. If a student has children under 15 (or 17 if the child is registered as having special educational needs), the grant pays a set rate of 85% of actual childcare costs throughout the whole year. For one child (academic year 2009/2010): up to £148.75 a week (85% of the actual costs of up to £175 a week) throughout the year. For two or more children: up to £255 a week (85% of the actual costs of up to £300 a week) throughout the year. The scheme is paid in three instalments, from the Student Loans Company.

European Social Fund (ESF) Projects

Funding is paid to support individuals with the costs of childcare for registered childminders, relatives or crèches while participating on the programme. Funding allocated (offered but not necessarily drawn down as yet) to ESF Projects for childcare provision under the current NI ESF Programme 2007-2013 for three years is as follows:

	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
ESF	£229,809	£393,169	£383,305

These figures are 100% of costs - the breakdown of this broadly would be:

- 25% DEL core
- 40% ESF
- 35% other public – a small proportion of which may be non-Executive funding.

In addition, DEL funds participation on childcare courses leading to qualifications through a number of its programmes. For example, DEL funds Further Education Colleges to deliver childcare qualifications and within the Steps to Work initiative, participants may undertake, where appropriate, an NVQ level 2 in Childcare Learning and Development.

University Courses

Mr C Lyttle asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the current cost to a university to provide (i) a three year humanities undergraduate course; and (ii) a five year medicine course.

(AQW 1123/11)

Minister for Employment and Learning: As my Department does not hold this type of information, the details below have been supplied by the universities. A three year humanities undergraduate course costs £21,000 at Queen's University and either £20,151 or £24,414 at the University of Ulster

depending on the area of study. A five year medical course at Queen's University costs £83,000. The University of Ulster does not offer a five year medical course.

City of Culture 2013 in Derry

Mr R McCartney asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether he has identified any funding from his Department's budget to be allocated to the City of Culture 2013 in Derry; and if so, how much and for what specific purpose, projects or programmes in the City of Culture is this money intended.

(AQW 1175/11)

Minister for Employment and Learning: The Department for Employment and Learning has not earmarked any specific funding from its budget to be allocated to the City of Culture 2013 in Londonderry. However the Department's mainstream provision for training and upskilling (e.g. in the hospitality sector) and for supporting Further and Higher Education makes a significant contribution to the cultural, social and economic life of the City.

Overpayments to Contractors

Mr T Burns asked the Minister for Employment and Learning (i) whether his Department has made any overpayments to contractors in each of the last five years; and if so to detail (ii) the goods or services which were overpaid; (iii) the projects to which the overpayments related; (iv) the value of the overpayments; and (v) whether the overpayments were successfully reclaimed from the companies or individuals overpaid.

(AQW 1285/11)

Minister for Employment and Learning: The Department has not recorded any losses relating to overpayments to contractors in its Resource Accounts for any of the last five years. Information relating to overpayments that may have taken place but were successfully reclaimed is not readily available. To extract this information would require individual business areas within the Department to review their records and to do so would result in disproportionate costs.

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Discover Ireland Website

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether the Northern Ireland Tourist Board has contacted the Gaelic Athletic Association in relation to putting GAA related events on the Discover Ireland website.

(AQW 851/11)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mrs A Foster): Tourism Ireland is the organisation responsible for the Discover Ireland website.

Broadband Speed in Rural Areas

Mr D O'Loan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the average speed of broadband in rural areas of North Antrim compared to urban areas of Belfast; and what measures are planned to improve the broadband speed in rural areas.

(AQW 934/11)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Broadband speeds depend on a wide range of factors, but speeds comparable to those available in Belfast are widely available across rural areas of North Antrim. DETI has provided funding for projects bringing direct international connectivity to the area, as well as next generation broadband services, wireless broadband services and remote broadband services.

Under the Next Generation Broadband Project, broadband upgrades are planned for 39 designated areas in the North Antrim constituency. By the end of August 2010, 12 areas had been upgraded and by May 2011 all designated areas are expected to be upgraded. Whilst this project is primarily directed at businesses, there will be spill-over benefits for other consumers.

Neighbourhood Renewal

Ms J McCann asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the services currently funded, fully or partly, by her Department under Neighbourhood Renewal in the West Belfast constituency.

(AQW 998/11)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: DETI does not currently fund services under Neighbourhood Renewal in the West Belfast constituency.

However, Invest Northern Ireland's Go For It programme is targeted at early stage entrepreneurs and start up businesses. It offers individuals a bespoke package of training and support to improve business capability.

Within the Go for It programme, there is a strong commitment to deliver on the Neighbourhood Renewal agenda. The programme offers opportunities for individuals living in Neighbourhood Renewal Areas to explore the concept of starting a business. The objectives of this component are to:

- Create belief in enterprise as a feasible option
- Create positive role models and improve the image of entrepreneurship
- Raise awareness of what is involved in starting a business
- Get community buy in for enterprise development in disadvantaged areas

Neighbourhood Renewal event budget allocation in 2010/11 for the West Belfast constituency is £4,200 and to date 73 individuals have attended pre start events with 52 from Neighbourhood Renewal areas. 152 individuals have participated on the start up element of the programme, 118 from Neighbourhood Renewal areas.

Translation of Departmental Papers

Mr A Bresland asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how much her Department spent on the translation of departmental papers into (i) Irish; and (ii) Ulster-Scots in (a) 2007/08; (b) 2008/09; and (c) 2009/10.

(AQW 1088/11)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: DETI has not spent any money on the translation of papers into Irish or Ulster Scots during 2007/08, 2008/09 and 2009/10.

Childcare Provision

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail (i) her Department's criteria for any funding of childcare provision; and (ii) how much her Department has invested in childcare provision in each of the last three years, including Sure Start programmes.

(AQW 1102/11)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: DETI has no responsibility for investing funds in outward facing childcare provision and as such does not have any criteria for that purpose.

At the request of the NI Executive Junior Ministers (OFMDFM) DETI made contributions of £60,000 in 2009/10 and 2010/11 towards the funding of Playboard School Age Childcare Projects.

City of Culture 2013 in Derry

Mr R McCartney asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether she has identified any funding from her Department's budget to be allocated to the City of Culture 2013 in Derry; and if so, how much and for what specific purpose, projects or programmes in the City of Culture is this money intended.

(AQW 1143/11)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: As part of the Budget 2010 exercise I have lodged bids for funding for the UK City of Culture 2013. Exact details of the allocation available for funding will only be decided once the outcome of the current budget exercise is known later in the autumn.

Broadband Service Provided by Avanti

Dr S Farry asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on (i) the survey on the coverage of the rural broadband service provided by Avanti; and (ii) the independent consultants report, commissioned by her Department, on the quality of this survey.

(AQW 1157/11)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: In July 2009 my Department commissioned Analysys Mason to monitor the performance of Avanti Communications in delivering satellite broadband services across Northern Ireland. As part of its monitoring process, Analysys Mason is conducting telephone surveys with Avanti customers on an ongoing basis, as well as undertaking a number of site visits. To end June 2010 Analysys Mason has conducted 315 surveys and 48 site visits. In reporting to the Department on the outcomes of this work to date, Analysys Mason has concluded that Avanti is delivering services in accordance with the specifications of its contract.

Defending Litigation Cases

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what the legal costs were to her Department of defending litigation cases in each of the last three years.

(AQW 1164/11)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The Department of Enterprise, Trade & Investment has spent the following defending litigation costs (figures exclusive of VAT) in the last three financial years -

07/08	08/09	09/10
£31,817	£75,459	£48,442

Working for Health Strategy

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment why the Working for Health Strategy has ceased and what progress has been made by the Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland in taking forward the recommendations proposed in Dame Carol Black's Review of the Health of Britain's Working-age Population.

(AQW 1200/11)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Whilst the Working for Health strategy has ceased, its broad aims and objectives have been subsumed by a number of other initiatives, notably the Inter-Departmental Group on Welfare Reform led by DSD, which is considering how the wide-reaching recommendations of the Dame Carol Black Review can best be implemented in Northern Ireland. Also the emerging Health and Safety Strategy for Northern Ireland which will see much closer co-operation and joint working between the Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland (HSENI) and its co-regulators the District Councils. For its part HSENI continues to promote good practice in regard to workplace health issues and has delivered programmes on mental well being, workplace stress, musculoskeletal disorders, asbestos related diseases, occupational carcinogens and asthmagens.

Department of the Environment

Northern Ireland Local Government Association

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of the Environment whether he has any plans to reduce funding from his Department to the Northern Ireland Local Government Association.

(AQW 1039/11)

Minister of the Environment (Mr E Poots): My Department's support funding for NILGA is provided to facilitate delivery of the local government reform programme and the commitment to funding the Association ceases on 31 March 2011.

Town Centre Management and Regeneration Projects

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the expenditure on town centre management and regeneration projects from 1 April 2010 to 31 March 2011 through (i) direct funding from councils; and (ii) indirect funding from council supported town centre management partnerships, including grant aid and public sector leverage.

(AQW 1042/11)

Minister of the Environment: The information is not held centrally by my Department but should be available from any individual council in which you have an interest.

Town Centre Management and Regeneration Projects

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the annual expenditure on town centre management and regeneration projects and initiatives through (i) direct funding from councils; and (ii) indirect funding from council supported town centre management partnerships, including grant aid and public sector leverage, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 1043/11)

Minister of the Environment: The information is not held centrally by my Department but should be available from any individual council in which you have an interest.

Childcare Provision

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (i) his Department's criteria for any funding of childcare provision; and (ii) how much his Department has invested in childcare provision in each of the last three years, including Sure Start programmes.

(AQW 1103/11)

Minister of the Environment: I can confirm that my Department does not fund childcare provision.

Rose Energy's Incinerator Plant at Glenavy

Mr D Kinahan asked the Minister of the Environment what action he is taking to resolve the technical concerns expressed by Radox over Rose Energy's incinerator plant at Glenavy.

(AQW 1124/11)

Minister of the Environment: The two Rose Energy planning applications for a Biomass Fuelled Power Plant and a Water Abstraction Facility have been fully assessed having regard to the Development Plan for the area and all other material considerations including the views of third parties and the expert advice provided by consultees.

There have been 6782 letters of objection and 6348 letters of support received in respect of the Power Plant application and 49 letters of objection received in respect of the Water Abstraction Facility.

Radox Laboratories Ltd. has submitted a number of detailed objections in respect of the proposal and the potential technological difficulties posed including emissions and the impact on all aspects of the

Randox business. Expert advice has been sought from consultees on the content of the objections, including advice from NIEA Industrial Pollution and Radiochemical Inspectorate (IPRI), DARD and the Agri-Food and Bioscience Institute (AFBI).

The expert advice provided by AFBI is that there is no scientific evidence to support the concerns raised by Randox Laboratories Ltd. In addition, the expert advice provided by NIEA IPRI is that the Industrial Pollution Prevention Control permitting process will take into consideration emission limit values and air quality/environmental standards to ensure no significant environmental impact arises from the operation.

Following advice from my planning officials, I am satisfied that the objection issues raised by third parties, including Randox Laboratories Ltd., have either been satisfactorily addressed by the applicant or can be controlled either under the IPPC permitting regime or by the imposition of planning conditions.

Advertising Vehicles

Mr D Kinahan asked the Minister of the Environment what action his Department is planning to prevent advertising vehicles being parked at roundabouts, motorway bridges and on roads near junctions.
(AQW 1125/11)

Minister of the Environment: Stationary vehicles which are adapted solely for the purposes of displaying an advert and parked on or close to the public road network require consent from my Department to display the advert under the Planning (Control of Advertisement) Regulations 1992.

However, such mobile advertising normally fails the requirements of current policy on the display of outdoor advertisements set out in Planning Policy Statement 17 which aims to protect the amenity and character of the surrounding area in question and prevent unsafe conditions for road users.

Where mobile adverts are placed in contravention of the Advertising Regulations this represents a direct offence and if not removed within a specified time my Department can immediately proceed to summons action. In recent months a large number of unauthorised mobile adverts have been removed from sites along main roads through enforcement action taken by Planning Service. My Department will continue to investigate any breaches of advertising control and take the appropriate action.

My colleague Conor Murphy MP, MLA, Minister for Regional Development has advised that, where any type of advertising hoarding is erected illegally on Roads Service property, or adjacent to special roads, action is taken by Roads Service to try and remove any such hoarding under Articles 87 and 21, respectively, of the Roads (NI) Order 1993.

Developments Built Close to Rivers

Mr D Kinahan asked the Minister of the Environment what action he is taking to ensure that all new developments being built close to rivers are monitored to ensure that the river is not polluted and that other environmental concerns are given due consideration.
(AQW 1127/11)

Minister of the Environment: The protection of Northern Ireland's rivers and other waterbodies is the responsibility of the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA).

NIEA protects the water environment in a number of ways, such as through its role as a consultee to Planning Service and Roads Service, the administration and monitoring of discharge consents, in accordance with the Water (Northern Ireland) Order 1999, the provision of pollution prevention advice and in the investigation of, and the taking of enforcement action as a result of, pollution incidents.

New developments have the potential to impact upon rivers through the uncontrolled discharge of site runoff during construction, river diversions, culverting or construction related pollution incidents. During the operation of new developments the discharge of sewage and/or trade effluent is the main concern.

At the planning stage NIEA will highlight any statutory requirements to the developer, in relation to the protection of the environment, and recommend best practice guidance for the construction and

operation of the development, such as the use of Sustainable Drainage Systems. In addition to these measures NIEA routinely recommends that the provision of a 10m buffer zone for rivers as a planning condition and where necessary the preparation and implementation of a River Corridor Management Plan may also be conditioned.

During construction and operation of new developments NIEA will carry out on site pollution prevention inspections to enable assessment of any risks to waterways to be made and to recommend effective mitigation measures.

NIEA controls discharge of sewage and trade effluent that cannot be connected to a public sewer, from existing and new developments to rivers and other waterways through the administration of a system of discharge consents. Discharge consents lay down conditions relating to the quality and quantity of effluent that may be discharged, in order to protect the receiving waterway. Once a discharge consent has been issued, compliance assessment monitoring is normally carried out on a risk assessed basis. Failure to comply with the conditions of a discharge consent is an offence under the Water Order and, if a discharge is non-compliant, appropriate action is taken by NIEA.

Sale of Alcohol and Illegal Substances from Private and Public Hire Taxis

Mr D Kinahan asked the Minister of the Environment (i) to outline his Department's responsibilities in relation to managing the sale of alcohol and illegal substances from private and public hire taxis and taxi ranks; (ii) to detail the number of recorded incidents of such sales in each of the last three years; and (iii) what discussions he has had with the Minister of Justice on this issue.

(AQW 1132/11)

Minister of the Environment: My Department has no legislative authority or responsibility in relation to the sale of alcohol or illegal substances from private and public hire taxis and taxi ranks. The Department for Social Development (DSD) is responsible for the Licensing (NI) Order 1996 which regulates the sale of alcohol by retail to the public. The Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) deals with issues around the illegal sale of alcohol and illegal substances and they will hold any records relating to such incidents in the last three years.

I would recommend that you address your questions to the DSD Minister in relation to his Department's responsibilities for the licensing of retailers to sell alcohol and to the Chief Constable to obtain information on the incidents of such sales as this is a PSNI operational matter.

Application for a Farm Based Wind Turbine

Mr M Storey asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of whether an application for a farm based wind turbine should be ruled out if it is located in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

(AQW 1163/11)

Minister of the Environment: Current planning policy ensures that my Department will support renewable energy proposals unless they would have an unacceptable adverse impact on:

- public safety, human health and residential amenity;
- visual amenity and landscape character;
- biodiversity, nature conservation or built heritage interests;
- local natural resources; and
- public access to the countryside

which are not outweighed by the local and wider environmental, economic and social benefits of the development.

An application for a farm based wind turbine cannot be refused planning permission simply because it is located in an AONB. It must be assessed against the criteria listed in policy RE1 of Planning Policy Statement 18 'Renewable Energy'.

Defending Litigation Cases

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of the Environment what the legal costs were to his Department of defending litigation cases in each of the last three years.

(AQW 1166/11)

Minister of the Environment: The legal costs incurred by my Department in defending litigation cases are tabled below.

	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
DOE	£368,348	£544,703	£274,070

City of Culture 2013 in Derry

Mr R McCartney asked the Minister of the Environment whether he has identified any funding from his Department's budget to be allocated to the City of Culture 2013 in Derry; and if so, how much and for what specific purpose, projects or programmes in the City of Culture is this money intended.

(AQW 1174/11)

Minister of the Environment: Until the outcome of the Executive's budget considerations is known, I am not in a position to confirm details of funding decisions for the forthcoming budget period 2011 – 2015. However, I can confirm my Department provided input to the Derry City bid to become the UK City of Culture 2013 and resources permitting will continue to provide support to this designation mainly through the action of the Planning Service in dealing promptly with any planning implications relating to the City of Culture 2013 event and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) by supporting the efforts of the City Council, Ilex, the Northern Ireland Tourist Board and others as they seek to realise the full potential of the city's built heritage.

Planning Applications on Hold

Mr R Beggs asked the Minister of the Environment to list all planning applications currently on hold at his request; and to outline the reasons for holding each planning application.

(AQW 1219/11)

Minister of the Environment: My Department is required by statute to determine all planning applications it receives. I will consider specific applications referred to me by my Department or following enquiries made by elected representatives. My Department seeks to deal with planning applications as quickly as possible.

General Grant to District Councils

Ms M Ritchie asked the Minister of the Environment, following his meeting with the Northern Ireland Local Government Association on 16 August 2010, what further action he intends to take to alleviate the impact on local communities of the reduction in the resource element of the General Grant to District Councils; and to make a statement on this matter.

(AQW 1225/11)

Minister of the Environment: In making the decision to reduce the resources element of the General Grant I recognised that there would be an impact on council services and that it would be difficult for councils to apply the reduction in-year. Nonetheless, against the Department's budgetary position, reductions of this magnitude and type were unavoidable and I only reluctantly decided to make the reduction after thoroughly considering all other possibilities. It is inevitable that the broader financial difficulties currently being experienced will have impacts across all of the public sector, including local government.

Since the decision to reduce the grant element was made against the background of departmental financial difficulties, it is not practicable for me to alleviate the impact of the reductions, and it will therefore be for each affected council to manage any change to the council services for their district.

General Grant to District Councils

Ms M Ritchie asked the Minister of the Environment what representations he has received regarding the reduction in the resource element of the General Grant to District Councils and from whom the representations were received; and if he will make a statement on this matter.

(AQW 1226/11)

Minister of the Environment: I received five letters about the reduction in the resources element of the General Grant. They were from The Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA), Down District Council, Newry and Mourne District Council, Strabane District Council and Craigavon Borough Council. I met with NILGA on Monday 16 August 2010.

In summary I was asked to rescind the cuts and, failing that, to give a guarantee that there would not be further in-year cuts which imposed budget difficulties on the affected councils. The resources element of the General Grant is only paid to those councils whose needs exceed their wealth.

I was also asked to undertake an Equality Impact Assessment on the level of funding. I explained that while the broad policy on the resources element of the General Grant has been Equality screened, it would not be relevant to undertake further screening for the level of the grant. An Equality Impact Assessment is a tool used to assist policy based decision making and not to determine levels of funding.

In making the decision to reduce the resources element of the General Grant I recognised that there could be an impact on council services. Nonetheless, against the Department's exceptionally difficult budgetary position in 2010/11, reductions of this magnitude and type became unavoidable. It is unfortunate that this step had to be taken, but it became inevitable that the broader financial difficulties currently being experienced would have an impact on the organisations in receipt of departmental funding, including local government.

Legal Action Against another Local Council

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of the Environment (i) how many times each local council has taken legal action against another local council; (ii) the reasons for legal action being taken; (iii) the outcome of each case; and (iv) the total cost incurred by all parties, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 1227/11)

Minister of the Environment: The information is not held centrally by my Department but should be available from any individual council in which you have an interest.

Legal Action Against an Executive Department

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of the Environment (i) how many times each local council has taken legal action against an Executive Department; (ii) the reasons for legal action being taken; (iii) the outcome of each case; and (iv) the total cost incurred by the local council, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 1228/11)

Minister of the Environment: The information is not held centrally by my Department but should be available from any individual council in which you have an interest.

Legal Action Against a Westminster Government Department

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of the Environment (i) how many times each local council has taken legal action against a Westminster Government Department; (ii) the reasons for legal action being

taken; (iii) the outcome of each case; and (iv) the total cost incurred by the local council, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 1229/11)

Minister of the Environment: The information is not held centrally by my Department but should be available from any individual council in which you have an interest.

Legal Action Against an Irish Government Department

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of the Environment (i) how many times each local council has taken legal action against an Irish Government Department; (ii) the reasons for legal action being taken; (iii) the outcome of each case; and (iv) the total cost incurred by the local council, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 1230/11)

Minister of the Environment: The information is not held centrally by my Department but should be available from any individual council in which you have an interest.

Environmental Disasters

Dr K Deeny asked the Minister of the Environment, following the recent environmental disaster at the Ajka Aluminium Plant in Hungary and the similarities between this situation and the recent leak from a dam containing toxic waste at the Cavanaw Goldmine, outside Omagh, whether he can offer an assurance that a similar environmental disaster will not occur.

(AQW 1342/11)

Minister of the Environment: The Gold Mining operation at Cavanacaw outside Omagh is owned by Omagh Minerals Ltd. The site is regulated by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) under two separate pieces of legislation:

- a) The Water (Northern Ireland) Order 1999; and
- b) The Pollution Prevention and Control Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003.

A discharge consent, under the terms of the Water Order (Northern Ireland) Order 1999, was issued on 8 July 2008 in relation to site drainage only, the consent does not permit any discharge from the process area. In order to check compliance with the conditions of the consent, the site has been placed on the NIEA compliance assessment and monitoring programme, and samples of the discharge effluent are collected 12 times per year. To date, all the samples that have been lifted have been compliant and have met with the consent conditions for all parameters.

NIEA also regulate the site under the Pollution Prevention and Control Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003 as a Section 3.5 Part B (a) process - grading, screening or heating of any designated mineral or mineral product. Operators of prescribed Part B processes under the above legislation are required to use the Best Available Techniques (BAT) to prevent / minimise releases to air.

Since 2006 to date there have been 12 reports of pollution investigated in relation to Omagh Minerals Ltd. These incidents have all involved pollution by suspended solids (tiny particles of solid material suspended in water). No pollution investigation has been undertaken by NIEA in relation to any toxic waste being released from the site at Cavanacaw.

The only pollution investigation undertaken involving a dam involved the collapse of a noise berm which had been constructed to stop noise from machinery impacting on neighbouring properties. The pollution was in the form of soil and was not of a toxic nature.

Planning Service: Breach of Condition Notice

Mr P Frew asked the Minister of the Environment (i) whether there is a time limit in which the Planning Service must act after it has issued a Breach of Condition Notice; and (ii) if the Planning Service has specified a time limit within which the breach must be rectified, but the applicant has not complied and

the Department has not acted, whether the previous service of Notice can still be relied on or if it is barred by the passage of time.

(AQW 1345/11)

Minister of the Environment: There is no time limit within which my Department must act in cases whereby a Breach of Condition Notice has not been complied with.

If an offender fails to rectify the breach within the time limit specified in the Breach of Condition Notice, my Department is not barred by the passage of time from taking further action.

John Lewis Planning Application at Sprucefield

Mr P Butler asked the Minister of the Environment to explain the criteria used and the reasons for granting a public inquiry into the John Lewis planning application at Sprucefield.

(AQW 1361/11)

Minister of the Environment: The planning application by Sprucefield Centre Ltd. for retail, restaurant and associated infrastructural development at Sprucefield, Lisburn was designated a major application under Article 31 of the 1991 Planning Order.

The application has generated considerable controversy and objections and has attracted widespread media interest.

Article 31 (2) empowers the Department to request that the Planning Appeals Commission (PAC) holds a public inquiry for the purposes of considering representations on an application. The alternative is to serve a Notice of Opinion on the applicant indicating the decision which the Department proposes to make on the application.

The key test in deciding the process route is whether a public local inquiry is necessary to provide a forum for the presentation and consideration of issues arising from representations received and which need to be assessed to allow me to determine the application.

There were clearly matters arising from the representations received and the assessment of the Sprucefield Centre Ltd. application that indicated that there are material planning considerations that are the subject of dispute among the interested parties. The matters involve the nature and scale of a range of complex impacts arising from the proposal. Given the scale of the proposal and these complex impacts I decided that the planning decision should be informed by discussion and clarification of the varying viewpoints through a public inquiry arranged by the PAC.

Accidents Involving Road Deaths

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of the Environment the percentage of accidents involving road deaths in each of the last five years that occurred between 10pm and 6am.

(AQW 1380/11)

Minister of the Environment: The Police Service of Northern Ireland collates statistics on road traffic collisions on public roads where persons are injured. My Department has no role in this matter and therefore does not hold the information requested.

I would recommend that you address your question to the Chief Constable as this is a PSNI operational matter.

Planning Decisions

Mr W Irwin asked the Minister of the Environment whether Planning Service can enable (i) the name of a planning applicant to be included on streamlined application lists; and (ii) the compilation of a monthly schedule of planning decisions issued in each District for use by local Councillors.

(AQW 1500/11)

Minister of the Environment:

- (i) My Department has updated the streamlined applications schedule to include the name of the applicant if there are no agent details provided.
- (ii) My Department is committed to the electronic delivery of planning information to Councillors, customers, consultees etc. and is in the process of rolling out the Electronic Planning Information for Citizens (ePIC) system which will be completed by December 2010. New facilities will be provided on the Planning Service website www.planningni.gov.uk by 1 November 2010 which will allow Councillors to search for lists of new applications and gain access to the plans, maps and drawings which accompany the application. Similar facilities will be provided for recent planning decisions.

At present, my Department does not provide a monthly schedule of streamline planning decisions issued in each District for use by Local Councillors. However, if considered necessary, a local District Council may request this information via their local Divisional Planning Office.

Department of Finance and Personnel

Civil Service Vacancies in the Derry City Council Area

Mr M Durkan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many vacancies there are in the Civil Service in the Derry City Council area, broken down by (i) grade; and (ii) Government Department.
(AQW 656/11)

Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr S Wilson): The number of vacancies in permanent Northern Ireland Civil Service posts, located in the Derry City Council area, in each of the Northern Ireland Departments including their Agencies, is set out in the attached table.

NICS VACANCIES (FULL TIME EQUIVALENT (FTE) BASIS) IN THE DERRY CITY COUNCIL AREA, BROKEN DOWN BY GRADE AND GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENT AT 24 SEPTEMBER 2010

	AA	AO	E02	E01	S0	DP	G7	Other		Total
								No.	Grade	
DARD	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	1
DE	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
DEL	2	-	-	0.5	-	-	-	-	-	2.5
DOE	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
DSD	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	Support Grade Band 2	4
DOJ	-	-	*2	*	-	-	-	-	-	*2
PPS	-	-	*1	*	-	-	-	-	-	*1
Totals	2	3	3	0.5	1	0	0	4		13.5

Departments not shown in the table had no vacancies.

- * DOJ/PPS Grade C spans both E01 and E02. There is an ongoing review of all Grade C posts to establish if they are equivalent to Executive Officer II or Executive Officer I.

Translation of Departmental Papers

Mr A Bresland asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how much his Department spent on the translation of departmental papers into (i) Irish; and (ii) Ulster-Scots in (a) 2007/08; (b) 2008/09; and (c) 2009/10.

(AQW 1086/11)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The amount spent on the translation of departmental papers into Irish and Ulster-Scots in each of the last three years is provided in the table below:

	Irish	Ulster-Scots
2009/10	£1,383.27	£743.39
2008/09	£810.58	£231.00
2007/08	Nil	Nil

The information is provided on the basis of financial years representing the basis of preparation of the Department's accounts.

Childcare Provision

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (i) his Department's criteria for any funding of childcare provision; and (ii) how much his Department has invested in childcare provision in each of the last three years, including Sure Start programmes.

(AQW 1109/11)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: As the central finance department, the Department of Finance and Personnel does not have responsibility for funding childcare provision. DFP has not provided funding for childcare provision in the last three years.

Central Procurement Directorate

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for a breakdown of income to the Central Procurement Directorate in each of the last five years.

(AQW 1115/11)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: A breakdown of Central Procurement Directorate's (CPD) income in each of the last 5 years is set out below:

	2005/06 £000	2006/07 £000	2007/08 £000	2008/09 £000	2009/10 £000
DARD	2,213	1,089	1,064	988	672
DCAL	612	389	702	867	1,041
DE	1,107	1,378	1,644	1,666	1,665
DEL	392	296	346	391	402
DETI	1,142	1,131	1,307	1,513	1,489
DHSSPS	171	103	110	146	200
DOE	1,753	643	802	970	898
DRD	1,014	803	738	655	822
DSD	1,737	1,670	2,013	1,909	1,673

	2005/06 £000	2006/07 £000	2007/08 £000	2008/09 £000	2009/10 £000
NIO	2,354	1,235	962	1,885	1,964
OFMDFM	700	282	591	913	1,471
Others	547	448	301	281	131
Total	13,742	9,467	10,580	12,184	12,428

CPD income is derived from provision of procurement services to government departments. Charges for these services are calculated on a full cost recovery basis.

Departmental Expenditure

Mr D O'Loan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what percentage of the entire departmental expenditure for the 2010-11 financial year is attributable to the (i) Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety; and (ii) the Department of Education.

(AQW 1191/11)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: Based on the outcome of the 2010-11 September Monitoring round the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety represents 47.5% of the current expenditure departmental DEL, 14.7% of the capital investment departmental DEL and 43.2% of total departmental DEL.

On a similar basis the Department of Education represents 21.2% of the current expenditure departmental DEL, 13.2% of the capital investment departmental DEL and 20.2% of total departmental DEL.

These figures are based on the departmental DEL budget excluding the Department of Justice and the Public Prosecution Service as the budgets of these departments are treated as ring-fenced for 2010-11.

Table may not add up due to roundings

TABLE 2: INCLUDING DOJ AND PPS

£million	September 2010 Monitoring					
	Current	%	Capital	%	Total	%
AOCC	2.0	0.0%	0.0	0.0%	2.0	0.0%
DARD	220.0	2.1%	28.2	1.9%	248.1	2.1%
DCAL	112.4	1.1%	49.2	3.4%	161.6	1.4%
DE	1,924.1	18.6%	181.7	12.5%	2,105.8	17.8%
DEL	807.5	7.8%	40.4	2.8%	847.9	7.2%
DETI	200.8	1.9%	98.3	6.8%	299.1	2.5%
DFP	191.3	1.8%	17.3	1.2%	208.7	1.8%
DHSSPS	4,307.9	41.6%	201.7	13.9%	4,509.6	38.2%
DOE	130.9	1.3%	13.0	0.9%	143.8	1.2%
DOJ	1,255.3	12.1%	72.5	5.0%	1,327.9	11.2%
DRD	513.6	5.0%	557.6	38.5%	1,071.2	9.1%
DSD	506.5	4.9%	171.8	11.9%	678.2	5.7%

£million	September 2010 Monitoring					
	Current	%	Capital	%	Total	%
FSA	9.3	0.1%	0.1	0.0%	9.3	0.1%
NIA	46.7	0.5%	2.8	0.2%	49.5	0.4%
NIAO	8.9	0.1%	0.2	0.0%	9.2	0.1%
NIAUR	0.5	0.0%	0.0	0.0%	0.5	0.0%
OFMDFM	81.4	0.8%	12.9	0.9%	94.2	0.8%
PPS	36.2	0.3%	0.8	0.1%	37.0	0.3%
Total	10,355.1	100.0%	1,448.6	100.0%	11,803.7	100.0%

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Acute Neurology Service Unit at the Royal Victoria Hospital

Mr J Wells asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether (i) hospitals outside the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust; (ii) service users; and (iii) service users' advocates were consulted regarding the decision to reduce the number of beds available within the Acute Neurology Service unit at the Royal Victoria Hospital.

(AQW 886/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Mr M McGimpsey): The Belfast Health and Social Care Trust is responsible for the delivery of services at the Royal Victoria Hospital, including specialised neurological services. The Trust will therefore consider the need for any changes to the provision of these services to meet the needs of the population including the requirement for consultation and data analysis.

I am however aware that the Trust plans to reduce the number of available neurology beds from 23 to 15 in October 2010 and bring the neurology service in line with comparable peers in other parts of the UK. The reduction in beds is being planned in parallel with an ongoing modernisation programme within the neurology service.

This programme includes a number of workstreams to review current neurology services and patient pathway models and includes a review of bed utilisation. The aim of the modernisation programme is to develop a more efficient and responsive service with reduced length of inpatient stays that will enable the same level of inpatient activity to be provided with a reduced number of beds.

Acute Neurology Service Unit at the Royal Victoria Hospital

Mr J Wells asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what data was used to inform the decision to reduce the number of beds available within the Acute Neurology Service unit at the Royal Victoria Hospital.

(AQW 887/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Belfast Health and Social Care Trust is responsible for the delivery of services at the Royal Victoria Hospital, including specialised neurological services. The Trust will therefore consider the need for any changes to the provision of these services to meet the needs of the population including the requirement for consultation and data analysis.

I am however aware that the Trust plans to reduce the number of available neurology beds from 23 to 15 in October 2010 and bring the neurology service in line with comparable peers in other parts of the

UK. The reduction in beds is being planned in parallel with an ongoing modernisation programme within the neurology service.

This programme includes a number of workstreams to review current neurology services and patient pathway models and includes a review of bed utilisation. The aim of the modernisation programme is to develop a more efficient and responsive service with reduced length of inpatient stays that will enable the same level of inpatient activity to be provided with a reduced number of beds.

Procedures for GP's Electronic and Manual Communications

Mr J Wells asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans he has to introduce procedures for all electronic and manual communications to enable GPs to indicate a patient's communication and mobility needs when referred for treatment.

(AQW 899/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Most GP practices use a standard referral template when referring a patient to secondary care. This template includes provision for the referrer to indicate any special needs including communication or mobility needs.

The NI Clinical Communications Gateway project has been initiated to facilitate the electronic transmission of GP referrals to secondary care using this template.

Written Correspondence to Patients

Mr J Wells asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when all written correspondence will be made available to patients in their preferred format.

(AQW 900/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Health and Social Care Trusts employ the most accessible and suitable means of communication to meet the individual needs and preferences of patients who are known to have a sensory impairment. This can include the use of large print, Braille or Moon; the transcription of appointments, letters, and other documents onto audio CD or cassette; and the use of email. Furthermore, my Department will soon publish for consultation a draft Physical and Sensory Disability Strategy, which will provide regional strategic direction on this issue.

Action Cancer Campaign to Ban Smoking in Vehicles with Children as Passengers

Mr J Wells asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the Action Cancer campaign to ban smoking in vehicles which have children as passengers.

(AQW 901/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I refer the member to the answer I gave to Assembly Question AQW392/11.

Mental Health Beds at the Downe Hospital

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many mental health beds are currently provided on the Downe Hospital site.

(AQW 915/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Downe Hospital currently has 25 Acute Inpatient Mental Health beds. Of these 5 beds are contracted by the Southern Trust which has indicated its intention to develop alternative arrangements for these beds in line with its Reform and Modernisation of mental health services.

Specialist Youth Mental Health Provision in North Down and Bangor

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what specialist youth mental health provision is currently available in (i) North Down; and (ii) Bangor.

(AQW 916/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Child & Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) which serves the South-Eastern Trust locality is managed directly by Belfast Health & Social Care Trust. The Tier 3 Specialist CAMH Service which covers the North Down & Ards sector is based at the Family Resource Centre in James Street, Newtownards, and offers a service to children and young people aged 0 - 18 years of age who experience significant mental health issues and require specialist intervention.

Other specialist CAMHS services which local children and young people can access are:

The Family Trauma Centre (Based at Wellington Park, Belfast);

The Child Psychotherapy Service (based at Wellington Park);

Drug and Alcohol Misuse Mental Health Service; and

The Eating Disorder Youth Service (EDYS, based at 10 College Gardens).

Those children and young people who require specialist inpatient care (Tier 4) may be referred to Beechcroft, the Regional Inpatient Mental Health unit for Children and Young people.

The statutory services in the Trust also work alongside other community and voluntary agencies in the locality of which there are many. The Public Health Agency in conjunction with SEHSCT has produced a directory of these services to inform the public of what is available to them.

Mental Health Services on the Knockbracken Site

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans he has for the provision of mental health services on the Knockbracken site.

(AQW 917/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Following a public consultation exercise Belfast Health and Social Care Trust has developed a business case for the reprovision of acute in-patient psychiatric services on a single site.

However, there are no firm plans in place as yet regarding the future provision of mental health services on the Knockbracken site.

Mental Health Services

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much of the total Health budget is currently allocated to mental health services.

(AQW 918/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Planned expenditure on mental health services in 2010/11 is expected to amount to £234m. This represents 8% of the total Health and Social Care budget.

It should be noted that this figure only includes funds allocated to the Mental Health Programme of Care and does not include any other funds which may also be used to deliver Mental Health services – e.g. by GPs in Primary Care.

Suicide Prevention Services

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much of the total Health budget is currently allocated to suicide prevention services.

(AQW 919/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The total health and social care budget for 2010/11 is £4.303 billion, of which £6.7 million has been allocated for the provision of suicide prevention services and initiatives. Funding for the provision of mental health services during the current financial year is £241 million.

McDermott Brothers Case

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety under what statutory authority the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority has the power to carry out the investigation into the McDermott brothers, Donagh case.

(AQW 921/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: This Review has been commissioned under Article 35(1)(b) of the Health and Personal Social Services (Quality, Improvement and Regulation) (Northern Ireland) Order 2003.

Contraceptive Pill

Mr J Wells asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many children under 13 years of age have been prescribed the contraceptive pill in each of the last three years.

(AQW 923/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information is not available to provide a detailed answer to the question in the format requested. However, the most recent data available for GP prescribing indicates that from August 2009 to July 2010, there were 38 distinct patients who were under 13 years of age at the time when a prescription for the contraceptive pill was written by a GP and dispensed by a community pharmacist.

It should be noted that the contraceptive pill can be prescribed for reasons other than contraception, eg for the treatment of menorrhagia.

Specialised Neurology Beds at the Royal Victoria Hospital

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what consultation was held with stakeholders prior to the decision being taken to reduce the number of specialised neurology beds at the Royal Victoria Hospital from 1 October 2010.

(AQW 927/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The delivery of services at the Royal Victoria Hospital is a matter for the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust as the service provider. The Trust is currently engaged in a programme of modernisation within the neurology service. This programme comprises a review of current neurology services and patient pathway models and also includes a review of bed utilisation.

The aim of the modernisation programme is to develop a more efficient and responsive service and the Trust have provided me with an assurance that the changes being implemented will not result in any deterioration in the delivery of neurology services. I am advised that there is ongoing liaison with clinicians throughout the Trust to ensure a more co-ordinated approach to the provision of effective, high quality care for patients with neurological conditions.

Review of Epilepsy Services

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in light of the commitment given at a meeting with the Foyle branch of Epilepsy Action, to outline the results of the review of epilepsy services in the Western Health and Social Care Trust area.

(AQW 929/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Following the meeting on Tuesday 15 September 2009 I advised you that a number of the issues raised would be taken forward with the relevant Health and Social Care bodies.

The Health and Social Care Board, as regional commissioner of services in NI, is currently taking forward a full and comprehensive evaluation and report on the effectiveness of the implementation of the 30 recommendations from the Adult Neurology Review of November 2000, which will inform the Department about the need for the further development of neurology services in Northern Ireland including the delivery of epilepsy services.

In addition my Department is developing a Physical & Sensory Disability Strategy which is expected to be launched for consultation by the end of this year. The strategy has been developed to help achieve improved outcomes, services and support for people in Northern Ireland who have a physical, communication or sensory disability or impairment.

Specialist Inpatient Neurology Services

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how specialist inpatient neurology services will be provided following the 35% reduction in dedicated beds.

(AQW 930/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The delivery of services at the Royal Victoria Hospital is a matter for the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust as the service provider. The Trust is currently engaged in a programme of modernisation within the neurology service. This programme comprises a review of current neurology services and patient pathway models and also includes a review of bed utilisation.

The aim of the modernisation programme is to develop a more efficient and responsive service and the Trust have provided me with an assurance that the changes being implemented will not result in any deterioration in the delivery of neurology services. I am advised that there is ongoing liaison with clinicians throughout the Trust to ensure a more co-ordinated approach to the provision of effective, high quality care for patients with neurological conditions.

Specialist Neurology Clinics

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the number of specialist neurology clinics in each Health and Social Care Trust area; (ii) the frequency of these clinics; (iii) the number of patients, on average, who avail of each clinic; and (iv) whether patients see the same consultant at each visit to ensure continuity of care.

(AQW 931/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The number of specialist neurology clinics in each HSC Trust for the year 2009/10, and the average number of patients who attend each clinic, is shown in the table below.

HSC Trust	No. of clinics ¹	Average attendances at each Clinic
Belfast	950	19.7
Northern	264	12.4

HSC Trust	No. of clinics¹	Average attendances at each Clinic
South Eastern	123	7.4
Southern	168	29.2
Western	436	9.0

Source: HSC Trusts

1. Number of clinics held in the year 2009/10, with the exception of the Southern HSC Trust who provided the number of outpatient neurology clinics they have agreed to hold. The actual number performed per annum may be slightly more as extra clinics may be arranged in response to periods of high demand.

All HSC Trusts hold multiple clinics each week at their various hospital sites.

In four of the five HSC Trusts, the exception being the Western HSC Trust, patients will remain under the care of the same consultant who treated them at their original appointment, or a member of that consultant's firm. On occasion a patient may be referred to another consultant neurologist with a sub-specialist interest where this is warranted. In the Western HSC Trust the patient may see a different consultant from their original appointment.

Epilepsy Specialist Neurologists

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of patients currently receiving treatment for epilepsy; and how many epilepsy specialist neurologists are currently available to treat these patients.

(AQW 933/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Under the Quality & Outcomes Framework (QOF) of the General Medical Services contract, the total number of GP-registered patients aged 18 and over receiving drug treatment for epilepsy at 31st March 2010 is 14,194.

There are 3 (3.0 WTE) Consultant Neurologists with a special interest in adult Epilepsy in Northern Ireland who run dedicated Epilepsy clinics. In addition to these specialists, all Consultant Neurologists would see patients with Epilepsy. Source: HSC Trusts.

Passive Smoking-Related Conditions

Mr J Wells asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many children have received treatment for passive smoking related conditions in each of the last three years.

(AQW 936/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information is not available on the number of children who have received treatment for passive smoking related conditions in each of the last three years.

Passive Smoking

Mr J Wells asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for the estimated annual cost to the Health Service of passive smoking.

(AQW 937/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information on the annual cost to the Health Service of passive smoking is not available.

Combating Bowel Cancer

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what additional resources are being allocated towards combating bowel cancer.

(AQW 940/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: In 2010-11 £2million has been allocated to the Public Health Agency to roll out the bowel cancer screening programme in Northern Ireland to include all eligible men and women aged 60-69. They will be invited to complete a Faecal Occult Blood Test (FOBT) kit which will be sent to their home every two years.

During the period 2008-09 to 2010-11 an additional £3m was allocated to cancer services and a further £3m for cancer drugs it is not possible to identify separately what proportion of this was used to treat people with bowel cancer.

In addition bowel cancer patients also benefit from a wide range of investment in other HSC patient care services right across the range of activity from secondary, community and primary care.

Early Prevention and Detection of Cancer

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what resources are currently allocated to the early prevention and detection of cancer.

(AQW 941/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Establishing a robust figure for the total spent on cancer prevention and early detection over a given period would incur disproportionate costs.

Waiting Times for Patients with Suspected Cancer

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the target waiting times for patients with suspected cancer to (i) have their first appointment with a consultant; (ii) receive a diagnosis; and (iii) commence treatment.

(AQW 948/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department's cancer waiting time performance targets, which are broadly in line with cancer targets in the rest of the UK, stipulate that 98% of patients diagnosed with cancer should begin their treatment within a maximum of 31 days, and 95% of patients urgently referred with a suspected cancer should begin their first definitive treatment within a maximum of 62 days.

In addition, women requiring an urgent assessment for suspected breast cancer are to be seen at a specialist breast clinic within 14 days of referral.

Though not a Ministerial target, it is agreed that the most appropriate management is for cancer patients to be seen for a diagnostic test as soon as possible, many within two weeks. This provides a more effective and streamlined pathway for suspected cancer patients than them being seen by a specialist at an earlier stage without access to test results.

Waiting Times for Cancer Patients

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the target waiting times for a cancer patient to receive a review appointment following treatment.

(AQW 949/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: There is no specific target waiting times for a cancer patient to receive a review appointment following treatment. The decision on when a cancer patient is reviewed is a matter for clinical judgement, however Trusts should ensure that all review appointments are seen in a more timely fashion and from March 2012, all reviews should be completed within the clinically indicated time.

Causeway Hospital

Mr A McQuillan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what reviews have been carried out at the Causeway Hospital in the past 12 months; and to detail their outcomes.
(AQW 957/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Northern Trust has advised that no reviews specific to the Causeway Hospital have been carried out in the past 12 months.

Maternity Ward in the Causeway Hospital

Mr A McQuillan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans have been made for the future of the Maternity Ward in the Causeway Hospital.
(AQW 958/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: There are no plans to change the current level of maternity provision at Causeway Hospital.

Complaints Against Hospitals

Mr S Moutray asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many complaints were lodged against each hospital in each of the last five years; and how many of these were upheld.
(AQW 962/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information on the number of complaints lodged and upheld in each Hospital is not available.

Staff Bonuses

Mr S Moutray asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much has been set aside for staff bonuses in (i) his Department; and (ii) the Health Service in (a) the current financial year; and (b) the next financial year.
(AQW 963/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: No funding has been specifically set aside for staff bonuses in my Department or for Senior Executive staff in the Health and Social Care in the current or the next financial year.

The NICS Special Bonus Scheme which applies to all staff in grades below Senior Civil Service (SCS) level allows Departments to reward exceptional performance in particularly demanding tasks or situations at any time of the year. The costs must be accommodated within the Department's existing running cost provisions and must not exceed 0.2% of the Departmental pay bill.

The 2009 SCS Pay Award did not include a bonus element. Final decisions have not yet been made regarding future SCS Pay Awards.

The 2009 HSC Senior Executive pay award did not include a bonus element.

Involvement of a Child in Criminal or Anti-social Behaviour

Mr S Moutray asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether a record is kept of the reasons why Social Services contact families in a situation where there are child welfare concerns following the involvement of a child in criminal or anti-social behaviour.
(AQW 964/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: A child who has been involved in criminal activity or anti-social behaviour may be referred to Social Services from a variety of sources, however this is seldom the sole reason for the referral. Children commonly present to Social Services with a range of issues and needs. Where concerns are raised about a child's welfare, for whatever reasons,

Social Services will conduct a full assessment of the child and family circumstances with a view to responding to any identified needs.

The PSNI, Public Prosecution Service, Youth Justice Agency and the Courts are the agencies with primary responsibility for dealing directly with young people who offend or are engaged in anti-social behaviour.

Paediatric Cases of Epilepsy

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the number of paediatric cases of epilepsy currently being treated; and (ii) the number of full-time paediatric epilepsy specialist neurologists currently in post.

(AQW 1003/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:

- (i) Information on the number of Paediatric cases of Epilepsy currently being treated is not available centrally.
- (ii) There are 3 full-time Paediatric Consultant Neurologists with a special interest in Epilepsy in Northern Ireland who run dedicated Epilepsy clinics. Source: HSC Trusts.

Epilepsy

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much it has cost to send epilepsy patients for surgery (i) to Great Britain; and (ii) elsewhere in each of the last three years.

(AQW 1004/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The cost of sending epilepsy patients for surgery to Great Britain in each of the last three years is shown in the table below.

Year	2009/10	2008/09	2007/08
Cost (£)	210,974	139,134	31,601

Source: Health and Social Care Board

The cost of sending epilepsy patients for surgery elsewhere in each of the last three years is shown in the table below.

Year	2009/10	2008/09	2007/08
Cost (£)	694	0	0

Source: Health and Social Care Board

Epilepsy

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people diagnosed with epilepsy have been admitted to hospital as a result of problems caused by generic prescribing in each of the last three years.

(AQW 1006/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information on the number of people diagnosed with epilepsy which have been admitted to hospital as a result of problems caused by generic prescribing in each of the last three years is not available.

Epilepsy

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what strategies he intends to deploy to ensure equality of treatment for people with epilepsy.

(AQW 1007/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: People suffering from this very debilitating condition, regardless of where they reside, have access for assessment and treatment to a variety of specialists depending on their individual clinical needs. Care is provided in secondary, primary and community care settings, including specialist regional neurology services.

In January 2008, my Department endorsed the NICE clinical guidelines on the diagnosis, treatment and management of epilepsy in children, young people and adults. However, I am aware that this guideline is currently under review and NICE expect to publish an updated guideline in March 2011.

Epilepsy

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, given that there are currently 13,000 people diagnosed with epilepsy, why he has reduced the number of specialist beds to treat epilepsy patients and has not increased the number of specialist neurologists available to meet appointment requirements.

(AQW 1009/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Specialist neurology services are provided at the Royal Victoria Hospital and it is a matter for the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust to profile and deliver these services to meet the needs of the local population. The Trust is currently engaged in a programme of modernisation within the neurology service, the aim of which is to develop a more efficient and responsive service.

The Trust has provided me with an assurance that the changes being implemented, including the reduction in available beds, will not result in any deterioration in the delivery of neurology services. They will continue to provide effective, high quality care to patients with neurological conditions, including epilepsy, in a more cost-effective and efficient manner.

Stabbing in Holywell Hospital

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in light of the recent stabbing of a nurse in Holywell Hospital, what additional measures will be put in place to protect staff.

(AQW 1020/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: This serious incident against a member of HSC staff will be subject to a full multidisciplinary review. This will include an immediate review of the effectiveness of relevant policies and procedures.

I want to assure you that my Department will scrutinise the outcome of this review carefully, as I am committed to Zero Tolerance policies and the protection of all healthcare workers.

Attack at Holywell Hospital

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what procedures are currently in place to protect staff from violent attack at Holywell Hospital and other health institutions which treat mental health patients.

(AQW 1021/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Northern HSC Trust, along with all other Trusts, has robust Zero Tolerance policies in place, with responsibility placed at senior executive level. My Department takes the issue of violence against staff and patients very seriously.

Across the HSC, there are a range of measures in place within mental health to protect staff and ensure that patients receive appropriate treatment and care. These include:

- Holywell Hospital and other health facilities that treat mental health patients have targeted training programmes in place for their staff on the management of aggression or potential aggression of patients [MAPA] and this is regularly updated.
- Comprehensive risk assessments and a management plans are identified in accordance with the Regional Risk Assessment Guidance [Guidance on Risk Assessment and Management in Mental Health and Learning Disability Services. 2009].
- All patients are subject to a Direct Observation Policy. The level of direct observation of a patient is determined by the risk assessment which is regularly reviewed.
- Patients who have been assessed as high risk to themselves or others may be transferred to a more appropriate facility such as the Psychiatric Intensive Care Unit [PICU] or to the Regional Secure Unit in Belfast. Policies and procedures are in place to support this process.
- There is also a policy in place for searching patient's belongings. If body searches are considered necessary, this will be requested from the PSNI.
- Staff working alone are offered personal alarms and this is backed up by a telephone call system linked to all the wards. The combination of both systems guarantees an immediate response to alerts from staff.

Missed Hospital Appointments

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many missed hospital appointments there have been in each of the last six months; and what is the estimated cost of these missed appointments.

(AQW 1023/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information on missed hospital appointments is collected by my Department on a quarterly basis. The number of missed hospital appointments during the Quarters Ending March 2010 and June 2010, the most recent quarters for which official information is available, is outlined in the table below.

Quarter Ending	Number of missed hospital appointments
31/03/10	43,956
30/06/10 ^P	41,024

Source: Quarterly Outpatient Activity Return

P Data are currently provisional

The estimated cost of the above missed appointments is not available.

North/South Health Budget

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans he has to reduce the North-South Health budget.

(AQW 1024/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: No decision can be taken on future budget outcomes for the North-South Health budget until I have a final notification of allocations from Department of Finance and Personnel in late December 10.

Funding for Adults with Physical Disabilities

Ms M Ritchie asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what funding is available from his Department for adults with physical disabilities in the South Down constituency; and how this funding is spent.

(AQW 1025/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: This information is not collated in the format requested and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Downe Hospital, Downpatrick

Ms M Ritchie asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the consultation process between the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust and General Practitioners affected by the Trust's 'Safety, Quality and Sustainability - Modernising Health and Social Care Services in the South Eastern Trust' consultation document in relation to the Downe Hospital in Downpatrick.

(AQW 1026/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: This is a matter for the South Eastern Health and Social Services Trust. The Trust has advised that its proposals for modernising services in its area have been circulated widely so that as many people as possible had the opportunity to consider and respond to the proposals, including General Practitioners. At the start of the consultation the Trust circulated approximately 900 letters to a wide range of stakeholders including 380 GPs in the South Eastern Trust area, highlighting the Trust's consultation document and how it could be accessed.

With regard to the proposals in respect of urgent care services in the Down area, the Trust has had two formal meetings with Down area GPs during the consultation process. It has also discussed the proposals at Trust meetings involving GPs and engaged in informal meetings with local GPs, and there was GP involvement during the development of the proposals.

Funding for Adults with Learning Disabilities

Ms M Ritchie asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what funding is available from his Department for adults with learning disabilities in the South Down constituency; and how this funding is spent.

(AQW 1027/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: This Information is not collated in the format requested and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Physiotherapists

Ms M Ritchie asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many physiotherapists are currently employed by his Department in each parliamentary constituency.

(AQW 1028/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: This Information is not collated in the format requested and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Newly Trained Speech and Language Therapists

Dr A McDonnell asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what assurances he can give that (i) unemployed locally trained; and (ii) unemployed newly trained speech and language therapists have equality of opportunity in gaining access to advertised posts as people currently employed within the Health and Social Care Trusts.

(AQW 1045/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Recruitment is a matter for Health and Social Care Trusts based on service needs and available resources. Individual HSC employers each have

recruitment policies in place that have been agreed locally in partnership with the Trade Unions. My Department carries out regional workforce planning to help ensure that suitable qualified staff are available to meet the needs of the Health Service. Workforce forecasts are regularly reviewed and corrective action is taken where necessary.

Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy

Ms D Purvis asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) when the revised Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy will be ready for consultation; (ii) whether the strategy will include an emphasis on building emotional resilience as well as mental health and wellbeing across all sectors; and (iii) what mechanisms his Department is proposing in the strategy to ensure appropriate implementation by all Government Departments.

(AQW 1054/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:

- (i) A draft version of the new Mental Health and Wellbeing Promotion Strategy will be available for consultation before the end of this calendar year.
- (ii) The new Mental Health and Wellbeing Promotion Strategy will aim to build emotional resilience as part of a population-based approach to promoting positive mental health and wellbeing. The strategy will have a particular focus on improving emotional resilience in the early years and among young people.
- (iii) The Public Health Agency will develop a detailed action plan for implementation of the new strategy, which will include co-ordination of relevant actions by other Government Departments. Implementation will be monitored under arrangements for delivering the Bamford Action Plan.

Promoting Mental Health - Strategy and Action plan 2003-2008

Ms D Purvis asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what lessons have been learned from his Department's 'Promoting Mental Health - Strategy and Action plan 2003-2008' and applied to the revised strategy on mental health and wellbeing.

(AQW 1055/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: A review of the implementation of the 2003/08 Promoting Mental Health Strategy was carried out in 2009. This exercise was led by the Northern Ireland Association for Mental Health. The findings from this review, and the associated report on mental health promotion in Northern Ireland, are helping to inform the development of a new Mental Health and Wellbeing Promotion Strategy. These findings include:

- The need for a robust strategy implementation framework.
- The importance of cross-sectoral collaboration.
- The need for further data collection, through research and surveys, to assist in evaluating the impact of mental health promotion activity.
- The importance of school-based mental health promotion, and the development of early years and parenting programmes.
- The workplace as a setting for mental wellbeing promotion.
- The need to engage with voluntary and community sector organisations on improving social inclusion of vulnerable people.

Occupational Therapists

Ms M Ritchie asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many Occupational Therapists are currently employed by the Health Service in each parliamentary constituency.

(AQW 1072/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information is not available in the form requested.

Funding Schemes for People with Disabilities

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what grants or funding schemes are available from his Department, or its arms-length bodies, to assist with projects undertaken by (i) groups for people with disabilities; or (ii) residential care facilities which cater for people with disabilities.

(AQW 1078/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: In 2009/10 funding totalling £2.4m was provided to assist with projects undertaken by groups for people with disabilities.

In that same year £47.9m was spent on provision of residential care for clients with learning, physical or sensory disabilities.

Replacing Nursing Uniforms

Mr A Bresland asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much has been spent by each Health and Social Care Trust on replacing of nursing uniforms in (i) 2007/08; (ii) 2008/09; and (iii) 2009/10; and how much each Trust plans to spend in 2010/11.

(AQW 1085/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The table below provides the information requested on nursing uniforms where available.

HSC Trust	2007/08 £k	2008/09 £k	2009/10 £k	2010/11 £k
Belfast	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Northern	207	275	250	110
Southern	114	88	55	90
South Eastern	154	147	191	179
Western	195	199	215	83

Belfast HSC Trust are unable to split out the specific cost of nurses uniforms from overall uniform costs. Information provided by South Eastern HSC Trust includes the cost of scrub uniforms worn by doctors.

The drop in budgeted cost in 2010/11 is a result of the new regional contract that has been put in place to standardise uniforms across the HSC.

Draft Childcare Strategy

Ms A Lo asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the Draft Childcare Strategy.

(AQW 1099/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department is not responsible for the development of a draft childcare strategy. The Office of the First Minister and Deputy first Minister (OFMDFM) has commissioned FGS McClure Watters to complete a policy and economic appraisal of the main policy options that could potentially underpin a new Childcare Strategy.

Childcare Provision

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) his Department's criteria for any funding of childcare provision; and (ii) how much his Department has invested in childcare provision in each of the last three years, including Sure Start programmes.
(AQW 1107/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department does not directly fund childcare provision. This falls to the Health and Social Care Board and Health and Social Care Trusts and is directed to assist children deemed to be in need.

That said, in the absence of funding from other Departments, my Department did contribute some £664,000 to sustain after school provision from 1 April 2008 to 31 December 2008, following the cessation of the Children and Young People's central funding package in March 2008. In addition, and following a request from OFMDFM, I agreed to contribute a further £80,000 for the 2009/2010 financial year, to help maintain afterschool capacity pending decisions regarding future policy and funding responsibilities.

With regard to the SureStart programme, the responsibility for this sits with the Department of Education.

City of Culture 2013 in Derry

Mr R McCartney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he has identified any funding from his Department's budget to be allocated to the City of Culture 2013 in Derry; and if so, how much and for what specific purpose, projects or programmes in the City of Culture is this money intended.
(AQW 1139/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Until I receive confirmation on the level of funding that my Department will receive as part of Budget 2010, no budget outcomes can be finalised.

However, funding for the City of Culture scheme would appear to be outside the role of the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety.

Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service has developed a business plan with a view to amalgamating with the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service.
(AQW 1144/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service works very closely with the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service on day to day operations and under the Northern Ireland Civil Contingencies Framework. However, I have no plans at present to amalgamate the two services.

Limavady Emergency Ambulance

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the total number of call-outs answered by the Limavady emergency ambulance in the last twelve months; and how many of these call-outs were outside the Limavady Borough Council area.
(AQW 1145/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: NIAS deploys its emergency response resources using a tactical deployment plan to ensure that the nearest appropriate response is sent to an incident. This means that the response to an emergency call in the Limavady area may be provided by an A&E ambulance or rapid response vehicle which is not based at Limavady equally ambulance resource based in Limavady may answer calls outside the area.

In the last twelve months the A&E ambulance based at Limavady responded to 1,665 calls of which 399 were outside the local area. However, in the same period, 968 incidents in Limavady were responded to by emergency response resources based elsewhere.

999 Calls

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether a 999 call is still shown as a 'red' call if a rapid response vehicle is in attendance but an ambulance is still required to attend the incident; and what is the target response time for the ambulance in these circumstances. **(AQW 1146/11)**

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The status of an emergency call is not affected when it is attended by a rapid response vehicle (RRV) and an A&E ambulance. However, the purpose of rapid responders is to get potentially life-saving care to patients within a target eight minutes so that an A&E ambulance can then transport them to hospital where appropriate. The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) would expect that, in these circumstances, the A&E ambulance should normally arrive at the scene within 21 minutes from the time the request for transport was made in 95% of cases.

Rapid Response Vehicles and Ambulances

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if rapid response vehicles and ambulances have separate control centres. **(AQW 1147/11)**

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: No, rapid response vehicles and ambulances do not have separate control centres.

Rapid response vehicles and A&E ambulances are dispatched from the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service Regional Emergency Medical Dispatch Centre (REMDC) at Ambulance Headquarters at Knockbracken.

Male Victims of Domestic Violence

Mr P Maskey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what services are currently available within Health and Social Care Services for male victims of domestic violence. **(AQW 1149/11)**

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Domestic violence is a cross-departmental issue which DHSSPS and DOJ jointly lead on. Male victims of domestic violence can access services including counselling within Health and Social Care through a range of mechanisms including:

- Accident and Emergency Services;
- Hospital and Community Mental Health Teams;
- Child and Family Services;
- General Practitioners and other primary care professionals;
- Child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS);
- Therapeutic work with fathers of children experiencing domestic violence; and
- Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferencing (MARAC) safety planning for high risk victims of domestic violence.

Surgical Unit in the Daisy Hill Hospital

Mr M Brady asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline his long-term plans for the surgical unit in the Daisy Hill Hospital.

(AQW 1197/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The surgical unit in Daisy Hill Hospital is an integral and essential component of the acute care service provided both within the Hospital and within the Southern Health and Social Care Trust's acute care network.

The Southern HSC Trust has assured me that this will continue to be the case.

Paediatrician in Downe Hospital

Ms M Ritchie asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when the paediatrician will begin work in the new Downe Hospital in Downpatrick.

(AQW 1249/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The recruitment and employment of appropriate staff to deliver services is the responsibility of Health and Social Care Trusts. The South Eastern HSC Trust has advised that a job plan for a joint community acute paediatric post is currently being developed. In the interim a consultant locum is providing the service in within the Downe Hospital.

Home Start Schemes

Mr D McNarry asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he is aware of the plight of the Home Start schemes in Ards, Comber and the Strangford Peninsula area caused by funding problems; and whether he will give Home Start schemes a priority rating next year to secure their future.

(AQW 1260/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I am well aware of the concerns being felt across the voluntary and community sector about funding in the current climate of increasing financial constraints on public spending.

As you know, work is well under way on the current Spending Review. However, you will understand, that until the outcome of this work is known, I am not in a position to give any commitments to any group about future funding arrangements.

Speech and Language Therapy

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the current whole time equivalent service provision in speech and language therapy for people aged 19 and over with a learning disability for (i) dysphagia; and (ii) communication support, in each Health and Social Care Trust area.

(AQW 1275/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information is not available in the format requested as staff employed in speech and language therapy in HSC Trusts in many cases cover both dysphagia and communication support. However, the table below shows the Whole Time Equivalent (WTE) number of staff employed in speech and language therapy in each HSC Trust in the area of adult learning disability.

STAFF EMPLOYED IN SPEECH AND LANGUAGE THERAPY FOR ADULTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITY IN EACH HSC TRUST

Trust	Belfast HSCT	Northern HSCT	Southern HSCT	South Eastern HSCT	Western HSCT
WTE	7.4	7.22	4.6	3.4	2

New GP Surgery in Meigh, County Armagh

Mr M Brady asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the progress of the new GP Surgery in Meigh, County Armagh.

(AQW 1289/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I refer the member to my previous response (AWQ7372/10) in which I advised that, subject to credit approvals, the Practice intended to commence work in August 2010. I am now advised that it is unlikely the project will commence before 2011.

Business Services Organisation

Ms M Ritchie asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when he will make a decision on the location of the regional Business Services Organisation; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

(AQW 1308/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I can advise that priority is currently being given by the Business Services Organisation to work on determining the location of Shared Service Centre with a consultation exercise expected to commence in late Autumn. In view of this, I do not expect further progress to be made on determining the location of a permanent headquarters for the Business Services Organisation until 2011.

Speech and Language Therapists

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of whole time equivalent vacancies for Speech and Language Therapists within each Health and Social Care Trust, broken down by the user age groups (i) 18 years old and under; (ii) 19-30 years old; (iii) 31-40 years old; (iv) 41-50 years old; (v) 51-60 years old; and (vi) over 60 years old.

(AQW 1309/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information on vacancies for Speech and Language Therapists broken down by user age groups is not available. The total number of Speech and Language Therapist vacancies can be found in the latest Northern Ireland Health and Social Care Workforce Vacancies Report at 31st March 2010, which is on the DHSSPS website at:

http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/vacancy_survey_march_2010_web_report-2.pdf

New Enhanced Local Hospital in Omagh

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the business case for the new enhanced local hospital in Omagh, including when a final decision will be made and when construction is expected to begin.

(AQW 1310/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: An updated business case will be submitted to my Department within the next few weeks. However, a final decision on this project can only be made once I have clarity on affordability. This is true of all capital infrastructure projects. My Department is facing huge financial pressures. Only when the outcome of Budget 2010 is known, will it be possible to make a decision on the timing of this project.

Attacks on Health Service Staff

Mr T Gallagher asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of attacks on Health Service staff by patients in psychiatric units in each Health and Social Care Trust area in each of the last four years.

(AQW 1311/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The number of attacks on Health Service staff by patients in psychiatric units in each Health and Social Care Trust area in each of the last four years is provided in the table below.

HSC Trust	2006 - 07	2007 -08	2008 - 09	2009 - 10
Belfast HSC Trust	383	447	804	654
Northern HSC Trust	254	284	281	322
Southern HSC Trust	*7	37	53	82
South Eastern HSC Trust	134	242	62	131
Western HSC Trust	168	301	**375	314

* **Note1:** Date for SHSCT for 06/07 is only available for Craigavon Area Hospital. Sperrin Lakeland Hospital did not use DATIX prior to April 2007.

** **Note2:** Figures for Western HSC trust for 2008/2009 are taken from legacy trust DATIX system and a new database introduced 1/1/09.

Regional Disablement Service at Musgrave Park Hospital

Mr T Gallagher asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people were employed (i) in office or administrative roles; (ii) as engineers; (iii) as Medical Technical Officers; (iv) in the Wheelchair Resource team; and (v) as store staff, in the Regional Disablement Service at Musgrave Park Hospital in (a) 2006/07; (b) 2007/08; (c) 2008/09; and (d) 2009/10.

(AQW 1366/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information requested is given in the table below.

STAFF EMPLOYED WITHIN THE REGIONAL DISABLEMENT SERVICE AT MUSGRAVE PARK HOSPITAL AS AT 31ST MARCH

Work Area	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
	WTE	WTE	WTE
Administration	9.7	10.3	10.3
Medical Technical Officers / Engineers	4.0	4.0	4.0

Source: Belfast Health and Social Care Trust.

Notes:

1. Information is not available for 2006/2007.

The Wheelchair Resource Team and Stores staff are not based within the Regional Disablement Service.

Children and Young People with Mental Health Conditions

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, for each of the last three years, how much his Department spent on sending children and young people with mental health conditions to other parts of the UK, for treatment which is not available in Northern Ireland.

(AQW 1369/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information requested is set out in the table below.

07/08	08/09	09/10
£1,320,400	£2,123,972	£2,116,895

Suicide and Drug Awareness Services in Colin Area, West Belfast

Ms J McCann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the (i) suicide prevention and awareness services; and (ii) drug and alcohol mis-use services available in the Colin area of West Belfast, including their locations.

(AQW 1417/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The following services, some of which are provided by outreach, are available in the Colin area:

(i) suicide prevention and awareness services	
Service	Location
Suicide prevention co-ordinator covering the Down/ Lisburn area, including Colin.	Lisburn Health Centre
Colin Suicide Prevention Task Group	Dairy Farm Centre
Colin Counselling	Family Centre, Poleglass
New Life Counselling	25, Ardoyne Road
Mulholland Aftercare	Dairy Farm Centre
Suicide Awareness & Support Group	209, Falls Road

(ii) drug and alcohol misuse services	
Service	Location
SEHSCT adult substance misuse treatment one day a week.	Stewartstown Road Health Centre
Drug and alcohol worker intervention and support for young people (DAISY) post one day a week.	Dairy Farm Centre
Dunlewey Substance Advice Centre	Stewartstown Road
Falls Community Council's Community Drug Project (by outreach). Worker in Colin area one day a week from November.	Sally Gardens Community Centre

Lifeline/Contact Youth has also been active in the area helping the Colin Neighbourhood Partnership and the Suicide Task Group to meet the needs of community youth workers in relation to suicide prevention.

Video Telemetry Machines

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many video telemetry machines are currently available in the Royal Victoria Hospital; and how many operators there are for these machines.

(AQW 1425/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: There are 3 video telemetry machines currently available in the Royal Victoria Hospital.

One member of the clinical physiology team is available for this service on a full-time basis.

Department of Justice

Prisoners' Earnings

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 7908/10, to detail (i) how much prisoners have been paid in prisoners' earnings in each of the last five years; (ii) the jobs or tasks undertaken by the prisoners to acquire these earnings; and (iii) the rate of pay for each job or task, broken down by prison.

(AQW 880/11)

Minister of Justice (Mr D Ford):

(i) The average annual remuneration paid to all prisoners is tabled below.

Financial Year	Maghaberry	Magilligan	Hydebank Wood	Total
05/06	£303,244.24	£310,755.64	£126,130.16	£740,130.04
06/07	£320,083.92	£315,610.88	£151,388.64	£787,083.44
07/08	£358,164.56	£310,755.64	£182,196.56	£851,116.76
08/09	£385,678.28	£327,918.24	£181,554.88	£895,151.40
09/10	£417,750.84	£319,349.68	£167,477.44	£904,577.96

(ii) The jobs or tasks undertaken by prisoners to acquire these earnings aim to encourage prisoners to address their offending behaviour, and work towards a full and productive re-integration into the community. Activities include education, training, work placements and other developmental activities, as well as participation in offending behaviour programmes. Further details in respect of each prison establishment are set out below.

MAGHABERRY

Education:	
Essential skills (literacy and numeracy)	GCSE Maths & English
Open University	Art
CLAIT	CLAIT plus
IT	
Vocational Training:	
Painting and decorating	Joinery
Furniture making	Tiling & plastering
Bricklaying	Industrial cleaning
Laundering	Gardening
Re-cycling	Braille workshop
Wheelchair repair / refurbishment	

Orderly work:	
Cleaning	Hygiene
Bins	Servicing the prison grounds
Kitchen orderlies	Tuckshop orderlies
Stores orderlies	Education orderlies
Library orderlies	

MAGILLIGAN

Education:	
Essential Skills (literacy and numeracy)	GCSE Maths & English
Open University	Art
CLAIT	CLAIT plus
NVQ IT	Microsoft Technician Course
Vocational Training:	
Painting and Decorating	Joinery
Plastering	Furniture Making
Metal workshop	Industrial cleaning
Tiling	Gardening
Re-cycling workshop	Picture framing
Print workshop	Gardening
Embroidery workshop	
Voluntary employment:	
Work in the community	Furniture making for the community
Orderly work	Benburb Priory
Orderly work:	
Cleaning	Hygiene
Re-cycling	Servicing the prison grounds

HYDEBANK WOOD YOUNG OFFENDERS CENTRE AND PRISON

Education:	
Essential skills (literacy and numeracy)	GCSE Maths & English
Open University	Art & Pottery
Ceramics	Hairdressing
Leather craft	Aromatherapy training
Cookery	Music
	English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)

Vocational Training	
Painting and Decorating	Laundering
Joinery	Catering
Plumbing	Bricklaying
Industrial cleaning	Grounds maintenance
Re-cycling workshop	Gardening
Cottage industries	Railway carriage restoration
	Sewing
Orderly Work:	
Cleaning	Hygiene
Re-cycling	Servicing the prison grounds

(iii) Rates of Pay and Incentive payments

All prisoners receive payment based on the NIPS Progressive Regime and Earned Privileges Scheme (PREPS) which was published on 15 June 2009. There are three levels - Enhanced, Standard and Basic.

The maximum weekly financial award at Enhanced level is £20; it is £11 at Standard, and £4 at Basic. The amounts detailed for both Enhanced and Standard include an 'incentive payment' of £6 which is paid when a prisoner is fully engaging in the regime and his/her Sentence Plan.

Sexual Offences Prevention Orders

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) the number of breaches of Sexual Offences Prevention Orders in each of the last three years, and of these, how many were classed as serious; and (ii) whether he intends to review the circumstances of these breaches, particularly in relation to how individuals were monitored.

(AQW 928/11)

Minister of Justice: Number of convictions for breaches of sexual offences prevention orders (SOPOs) and number of related defendants 2007-09

	Number of convictions for breaches of SOPO	Number of defendants	Number of defendants dealt with in magistrates' courts	Number of defendants dealt with in Crown Court
2007	10	9	8	1
2008	20	17	16	1
2009	36	25	24	1

Data include the offences of 'breach of sexual offences prevention orders and 'breach of interim sexual offences prevention orders'.

Sexual offences prevention orders are civil orders which place prohibitions on a person where the court considers it necessary for the purpose of protecting the public from serious sexual harm. If the person breaches the terms of the order it is an arrestable criminal offence. The duty of the police is to arrest any person found to be in breach of the conditions of the SOPO, the prosecution service to decide on the seriousness of the breach and the court to make the appropriate disposal.

The policy and practice in relation to the assessment and management of risk posed by sex offenders, including reviews of individual cases, are contained in the statutory public protection guidance to agencies and the manual of practice. Both of these documents are available on the public protection website.

Failings in the Maze Prison

Mr S Anderson asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 497/11, whether any general guidelines were set for the project team on how long it should deliberate; and if its findings and recommendations will be published.

(AQW 968/11)

Minister of Justice: Recommendation 2 of the Billy Wright Inquiry Report stated: "We recommend that the SOSNI and those with recently devolved authority should satisfy themselves that any relevant lessons from HMP Maze have been learned for HMP Maghaberry".

The guidelines require the Northern Ireland Prison Service's project team to focus on whether the expectations, derived explicitly from standards and policies deployed within England and Wales, as set out in the Billy Wright Inquiry Report, are currently being met. These expectations were turned into a set of baselines and an audit undertaken across the entire Prison Service estate.

The project team presented its initial internal assessment to the Director General on 8 October, in line with the original schedule. The final report is scheduled to be presented to myself and the Secretary of State by the Director General by the end of this month. It will include an action plan, with associated resource implications and indicative timescales for delivery,

Ministers will look to the Northern Ireland Prison Service for advice, in view of the need to avoid any potential compromise to security, on the material that may be placed in the public domain.

Civil Disturbances

Mr S Anderson asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 499/11, whether in the series of meetings listed he discussed (i) illegal dissident republican parades and protests and the failure to prosecute those responsible; and (ii) the level of arrests following repeated dissident republican rioting in Craigavon.

(AQW 969/11)

Minister of Justice: I have not had any specific meetings to discuss these matters. I have, however, received regular updates from the police in respect of those contentious parades and protests which had the potential to lead to public disorder, and the number of arrests following such incidents. The investigation of those responsible for any breach of the law is a matter for the Chief Constable and responsibility for prosecution rests with the Public Prosecution Service.

Convictions for Burglary or Similar Offences

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) the number of people convicted of burglary or similar offences in each of the last five years; (ii) the maximum sentence for each offence; and (iii) how many people received the maximum sentence, broken down by type of offence.

(AQW 974/11)

Minister of Justice: Tables 1 to 5 below document the number convicted for burglary offences, the maximum sentence which can be given and the number of offenders who were given the maximum sentence by offence. For those offences which may be tried either on indictment at the Crown Court or summarily at a magistrates' court, the maxima for both are documented.

Data cover the calendar years 2002 to 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.

TABLE 1: NUMBER CONVICTED FOR BURGLARY OFFENCES¹, THE MAXIMUM SENTENCE WHICH CAN BE GIVEN AND THE NUMBER RECEIVING THE MAXIMUM SENTENCE BY OFFENCE 2002

Offence	Total number convicted	On indictment		Summarily	
		Maximum custodial sentence which can be given	Number given maximum custodial sentence	Maximum custodial sentence which can be given	Number given maximum custodial sentence
Aggravated burglary with intent to commit grievous bodily harm	2	Life	0	-	-
Aggravated burglary with intent to do unlawful damage	1	Life	0	-	-
Aggravated burglary and stealing	1	Life	0	-	-
Aggravated burglary and attempting to steal	1	Life	0	-	-
Aggravated burglary and inflicting grievous bodily harm	1	Life	0	-	-
Aggravated burglary and attempting to inflict grievous bodily harm	1	Life	0	-	-
Aggravated burglary with intent to rape	1	Life	0	-	-
Burglary with intent to steal (dwelling)	56	14 years	0	12 months	1
Burglary with intent to steal (non-dwelling)	83	14 years	0	12 months	0

Offence	Total number convicted	On indictment		Summarily	
		Maximum custodial sentence which can be given	Number given maximum custodial sentence	Maximum custodial sentence which can be given	Number given maximum custodial sentence
Burglary with intent to commit grievous bodily harm	1	14 years	0	-	-
Burglary with intent to cause unlawful damage	12	14 years	0	12 months	0
Burglary and theft (dwelling)	160	14 years	0	12 months	3
Burglary and theft (non-dwelling)	203	14 years	0	12 months	1
Burglary inflicting grievous bodily harm	3	14 years	0	-	-
Burglary and attempted theft (dwelling)	5	14 years	0	12 months	0
Burglary and attempted theft (non-dwelling)	9	14 years	0	12 months	0
Going equipped for burglary	13	3 years	0	12 months	0
Going equipped for theft	42	3 years	0	12 months	0
Total	595				

TABLE 2: NUMBER CONVICTED FOR BURGLARY OFFENCES¹, THE MAXIMUM SENTENCE WHICH CAN BE GIVEN AND THE NUMBER RECEIVING THE MAXIMUM SENTENCE BY OFFENCE 2003

Offence	Total number convicted	On indictment		Summarily	
		Maximum custodial sentence which can be given	Number given maximum custodial sentence	Maximum custodial sentence which can be given	Number given maximum custodial sentence
Aggravated burglary with intent to steal	2	Life	0	-	-
Aggravated burglary with intent to commit grievous bodily harm	3	Life	0	-	-
Aggravated burglary and attempting to steal	1	Life	0	-	-
Aggravated burglary and attempting to inflict grievous bodily harm	1	Life	0	-	-
Aggravated burglary with intent to inflict grievous bodily harm	1	Life	0	-	-
Aggravated burglary and stealing	3	Life	0	-	-
Burglary with intent to steal (dwelling)	57	14 years	0	12 months	1
Burglary with intent to steal (non-dwelling)	74	14 years	0	12 months	0
Burglary with intent to commit grievous bodily harm	1	14 years	0	-	-

Offence	Total number convicted	On indictment		Summarily	
		Maximum custodial sentence which can be given	Number given maximum custodial sentence	Maximum custodial sentence which can be given	Number given maximum custodial sentence
Burglary with intent to cause unlawful damage	20	14 years	0	12 months	0
Burglary and theft (dwelling)	172	14 years	0	12 months	2
Burglary and theft (non-dwelling)	206	14 years	0	12 months	2
Burglary inflicting grievous bodily harm	1	14 years	0	-	-
Burglary – attempting to inflict grievous bodily harm	1	14 years	0	-	-
Burglary and attempted theft (non-dwelling)	10	14 years	0	12 months	0
Going equipped for burglary	7	3 years	0	12 months	0
Going equipped for theft	42	3 years	0	12 months	0
Total	602				

TABLE 3: NUMBER CONVICTED FOR BURGLARY OFFENCES¹, THE MAXIMUM SENTENCE WHICH CAN BE GIVEN AND THE NUMBER RECEIVING THE MAXIMUM SENTENCE BY OFFENCE 2004

Offence	Total number convicted	On indictment		Summarily	
		Maximum custodial sentence which can be given	Number given maximum custodial sentence	Maximum custodial sentence which can be given	Number given maximum custodial sentence
Aggravated burglary with intent to steal	7	Life	0	-	-

Offence	Total number convicted	On indictment		Summarily	
		Maximum custodial sentence which can be given	Number given maximum custodial sentence	Maximum custodial sentence which can be given	Number given maximum custodial sentence
Aggravated burglary and stealing	3	Life	0	-	-
Aggravated burglary with intent to steal	2	Life	0	-	-
Aggravated burglary with intent to inflict grievous bodily harm	3	Life	0	-	-
Aggravated burglary and stealing	2	Life	0	-	-
Burglary with intent to steal (dwelling)	54	14 years	0	12 months	1
Burglary with intent to steal (non-dwelling)	81	14 years	0	12 months	0
Burglary with intent to commit grievous bodily harm	4	14 years	0	-	-
Burglary with intent to cause unlawful damage	13	14 years	0	12 months	0
Burglary and theft (dwelling)	196	14 years	0	12 months	1
Burglary and theft (non-dwelling)	199	14 years	0	12 months	1
Burglary inflicting grievous bodily harm	1	14 years	0	-	-

Offence	Total number convicted	On indictment		Summarily	
		Maximum custodial sentence which can be given	Number given maximum custodial sentence	Maximum custodial sentence which can be given	Number given maximum custodial sentence
Burglary and attempted theft (non-dwelling)	5	14 years	0	12 months	0
Going equipped for burglary	15	3 years	0	12 months	0
Going equipped for theft	35	3 years	0	12 months	1
Total	620				

TABLE 4: NUMBER CONVICTED FOR BURGLARY OFFENCES¹, THE MAXIMUM SENTENCE WHICH CAN BE GIVEN AND THE NUMBER RECEIVING THE MAXIMUM SENTENCE BY OFFENCE 2005

Offence	Total number convicted	On indictment		Summarily	
		Maximum custodial sentence which can be given	Number given maximum custodial sentence	Maximum custodial sentence which can be given	Number given maximum custodial sentence
Aggravated burglary with intent to steal	3	Life	0	-	-
Aggravated burglary with intent to commit grievous bodily harm	6	Life	0	-	-
Aggravated burglary and stealing	1	Life	0	-	-
Aggravated burglary and attempting to steal	1	Life	0	-	-
Aggravated burglary and inflicting grievous bodily harm	1	Life	0	-	-

Offence	Total number convicted	On indictment		Summarily	
		Maximum custodial sentence which can be given	Number given maximum custodial sentence	Maximum custodial sentence which can be given	Number given maximum custodial sentence
Aggravated burglary and attempting to inflict grievous bodily harm	1	Life	0	-	-
Aggravated burglary and attempting to steal	2	Life	0	-	-
Aggravated burglary and attempting to inflict grievous bodily harm	1	Life	0	-	-
Burglary with intent to steal (dwelling)	53	14 years	0	12 months	0
Burglary with intent to steal (non-dwelling)	61	14 years	0	12 months	0
Burglary with intent to cause unlawful damage	24	14 years	0	12 months	0
Burglary and theft (dwelling)	190	14 years	0	12 months	1
Burglary and theft (non-dwelling)	155	14 years	0	12 months	1
Burglary inflicting grievous bodily harm	6	14 years	0	-	-
Burglary and attempted theft (dwelling)	1	14 years	0	12 months	0
Burglary and attempted theft (non-dwelling)	1	14 years	0	12 months	0

Offence	Total number convicted	On indictment		Summarily	
		Maximum custodial sentence which can be given	Number given maximum custodial sentence	Maximum custodial sentence which can be given	Number given maximum custodial sentence
Going equipped for burglary	11	3 years	0	12 months	0
Going equipped for theft	38	3 years	0	12 months	0
Going equipped to cheat	1	3 years	0	12 months	0
Total	557				

TABLE 5: NUMBER CONVICTED FOR BURGLARY OFFENCES¹, THE MAXIMUM SENTENCE WHICH CAN BE GIVEN AND THE NUMBER RECEIVING THE MAXIMUM SENTENCE BY OFFENCE 2006

Offence	Total number convicted	On indictment		Summarily	
		Maximum custodial sentence which can be given	Number given maximum custodial sentence	Maximum custodial sentence which can be given	Number given maximum custodial sentence
Aggravated burglary with intent to steal	3	Life	0	-	-
Aggravated burglary with intent to commit grievous bodily harm	1	Life	0	-	-
Aggravated burglary and stealing	2	Life	0	-	-
Aggravated burglary and inflicting grievous bodily harm	5	Life	0	-	-
Aggravated burglary and attempting to inflict grievous bodily harm	1	Life	0	-	-

Offence	Total number convicted	On indictment		Summarily	
		Maximum custodial sentence which can be given	Number given maximum custodial sentence	Maximum custodial sentence which can be given	Number given maximum custodial sentence
Aggravated burglary and inflicting grievous bodily harm	1	Life	0	-	-
Burglary with intent to steal (dwelling)	47	14 years	0	12 months	0
Burglary with intent to steal (non-dwelling)	60	14 years	0	12 months	0
Burglary with intent to commit grievous bodily harm	2	14 years	0	-	-
Burglary with intent to commit rape	1	14 years	0	-	-
Burglary with intent to cause unlawful damage	17	14 years	0	12 months	0
Burglary and theft (dwelling)	193	14 years	0	12 months	0
Burglary and theft (non-dwelling)	158	14 years	0	12 months	0
Burglary inflicting grievous bodily harm	3	14 years	0	-	-
Burglary and attempted theft (dwelling)	2	14 years	0	12 months	0
Burglary and attempted theft (non-dwelling)	7	14 years	0	12 months	0

Offence	Total number convicted	On indictment		Summarily	
		Maximum custodial sentence which can be given	Number given maximum custodial sentence	Maximum custodial sentence which can be given	Number given maximum custodial sentence
Going equipped for burglary	8	3 years	0	12 months	0
Going equipped for theft	20	3 years	0	12 months	0
Going equipped to cheat	1	3 years	0	12 months	0
Total	532				

Note:

- 1 For some of these offences the maximum penalty may be a term of imprisonment and/or a fine; the imprisonment element has been considered for the tables. It is not possible to determine from the court dataset if an offender received both disposals.

People Convicted of Sexual Offences

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) the number of people convicted of sexual offences in each of the last five years; (ii) the maximum sentence for each offence; and (iii) how many people received the maximum sentence, broken down by type of offence.

(AQW 975/11)

Minister of Justice: Tables 1 to 5 below document the number convicted for sexual offences, the maximum sentence which can be given and the number of offenders who were given the maximum sentence by offence. For those offences which may be tried on indictment at the Crown Court or summarily at a magistrates' court, the maxima for both are documented.

Data cover the calendar years 2002 to 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.

You will be aware that I have recently published a consultation paper which considers the role of a sentencing guidelines mechanism in Northern Ireland and explores how this might further support consistency, transparency and public confidence in sentencing. I look forward to hearing the views of everyone interested in this important aspect of the administration of justice.

TABLE 1: NUMBER CONVICTED FOR SEXUAL OFFENCES¹, THE MAXIMUM SENTENCE WHICH CAN BE GIVEN AND THE NUMBER WHO RECEIVED THE MAXIMUM SENTENCE BY OFFENCE 2002

Offence	Total number convicted	On indictment		Summarily	
		Maximum custodial sentence which can be given	Number given maximum custodial sentence	Maximum custodial sentence which can be given	Number given maximum custodial sentence
Rape	10	Life	0	-	-

Offence	Total number convicted	On indictment		Summarily	
		Maximum custodial sentence which can be given	Number given maximum custodial sentence	Maximum custodial sentence which can be given	Number given maximum custodial sentence
Assault with intent to commit buggery	1	10 years	0	-	-
Gross indecency with child	4	10 years	0	6 months	1
Buggery with boy under 16 years	1	Life	0	-	-
Unlawful carnal knowledge of a girl under 14 years	1	Life	0	-	-
Unlawful carnal knowledge of a girl under 17 years	1	2 years	0	12 months	0
Manager inducing defective to use premises for intercourse	1	2 years	0	-	-
Incest by man on female	1	7 years	0	-	-
Indecent assault on female	43	10 years	0	12 months	0
Indecent assault on male	10	10 years	0	12 months	0
Indecent assault on female child	2	10 years	0	12 months	0
Indecent exposure ³	3	Unlimited imprisonment	-	-	-

Offence	Total number convicted	On indictment		Summarily	
		Maximum custodial sentence which can be given	Number given maximum custodial sentence	Maximum custodial sentence which can be given	Number given maximum custodial sentence
Distributing indecent photograph or pseudo photographs of children	2	10 years	0	6 months	0
Taking indecent photograph or pseudo photographs of children	4	10 years	0	6 months	0
Total	84				

TABLE 2: NUMBER CONVICTED FOR SEXUAL OFFENCES¹, THE MAXIMUM SENTENCE WHICH CAN BE GIVEN AND THE NUMBER WHO RECEIVED THE MAXIMUM SENTENCE BY OFFENCE 2003

Offence	Total number convicted	On indictment		Summarily	
		Maximum custodial sentence which can be given	Number given maximum custodial sentence	Maximum custodial sentence which can be given	Number given maximum custodial sentence
Rape	10	Life	0	-	-
Buggery ²	1	Life	0	-	-
Gross indecency with child	6	10 years	0	6 months	0
Buggery with boy under 16 years	1	Life	0	-	-
Gross indecency with a male under 18 years	1	5 years	0	12 months	0
Unlawful carnal knowledge of a girl under 14 years	1	Life	0	-	-

Offence	Total number convicted	On indictment		Summarily	
		Maximum custodial sentence which can be given	Number given maximum custodial sentence	Maximum custodial sentence which can be given	Number given maximum custodial sentence
Unlawful carnal knowledge of a girl under 17 years	5	2 years	0	12 months	0
Indecent assault on female	57	10 years	0	12 months	2
Indecent assault on male	6	10 years	0	12 months	0
Indecent assault on female child	3	10 years	0	12 months	0
Indecent exposure ³	2	Unlimited imprisonment	-	-	-
Bigamy	2	7 years	0	12 months	0
Possessing indecent photograph or pseudo photograph of a child	2	5 years	0	6 months	0
Taking indecent photograph or pseudo photographs of children	10	10 years	0	6 months	0
Copying indecent photograph or pseudo photographs of children	1	10 years	0	6 months	0
Total	108				

TABLE 3: NUMBER CONVICTED FOR SEXUAL OFFENCES¹, THE MAXIMUM SENTENCE WHICH CAN BE GIVEN AND THE NUMBER WHO RECEIVED THE MAXIMUM SENTENCE BY OFFENCE 2004

Offence	Total number convicted	On indictment		Summarily	
		Maximum custodial sentence which can be given	Number given maximum custodial sentence	Maximum custodial sentence which can be given	Number given maximum custodial sentence
Rape	18	Life	1	-	-
Gross indecency with child	3	10 years	0	6 months	0
Buggery with boy under 16 years	6	Life	0	-	-
Buggery with a woman	1	Life	0	-	-
Buggery with a girl	1	Life	0	-	-
Unlawful carnal knowledge of a girl under 14 years	4	Life	0	-	-
Unlawful carnal knowledge of a girl under 17 years	2	2 years	0	12 months	0
Indecent assault on a female	57	10 years	0	12 months	1
Indecent assault on a male	17	10 years	0	12 months	0
Indecent assault on a female child	3	10 years	0	12 months	0
Indecent assault on a male child	4	10 years	0	12 months	0
Indecent exposure ³	2	2 years	0	6 months	0

Offence	Total number convicted	On indictment		Summarily	
		Maximum custodial sentence which can be given	Number given maximum custodial sentence	Maximum custodial sentence which can be given	Number given maximum custodial sentence
Distributing indecent photograph or pseudo photographs of children	1	10 years	0	6 months	0
Possession of indecent/ pseudo photograph(s) with a view to distribution	1	10 years	0	6 months	0
Taking indecent photograph or pseudo photographs of children	8	10 years	0	6 months	0
Copying indecent photograph or pseudo photographs of children	2	10 years	0	6 months	0
Making indecent photograph or pseudo photographs of children	7	10 years	0	6 months	0
Total	137				

TABLE 4: NUMBER CONVICTED FOR SEXUAL OFFENCES¹, THE MAXIMUM SENTENCE WHICH CAN BE GIVEN AND THE NUMBER WHO RECEIVED THE MAXIMUM SENTENCE BY OFFENCE 2005

Offence	Total number convicted	On indictment		Summarily	
		Maximum custodial sentence which can be given	Number given maximum custodial sentence	Maximum custodial sentence which can be given	Number given maximum custodial sentence
Rape	8	Life	0	-	-

Offence	Total number convicted	On indictment		Summarily	
		Maximum custodial sentence which can be given	Number given maximum custodial sentence	Maximum custodial sentence which can be given	Number given maximum custodial sentence
Gross indecency with child	6	10 years	0	6 months	1
Buggery with boy under 16 years	1	Life	0	-	-
Unlawful carnal knowledge of a girl under 14 years	3	Life	0	-	-
Unlawful carnal knowledge of a girl under 17 years	4	2 years	0	12 months	0
Permitting girl under 17 years to use premises for intercourse	1	2 years	0	12 months	0
Incest by man on female	1	7 years	0	-	-
Indecent assault on a female	51	10 years	0	12 months	0
Indecent assault on a male	11	10 years	0	12 months	0
Indecent assault on a female child	18	10 years	0	12 months	0
Indecent assault on a male child	5	10 years	0	12 months	0
Indecent exposure ³	2	2 years	0	6 months	0
Exposure	3	2 years	0	6 months	0
Voyeurism	2	2 years	0	6 months	0

Offence	Total number convicted	On indictment		Summarily	
		Maximum custodial sentence which can be given	Number given maximum custodial sentence	Maximum custodial sentence which can be given	Number given maximum custodial sentence
Sex offender failing to notify police of change of address	6	5 years	0	6 months	0
Breach of interim Sex Offenders Prevention Order	1	5 years	0	6 months	0
Bigamy	1	7 years	0	12 months	0
Distributing indecent photograph or pseudo photographs of children	1	10 years	0	6 months	0
Taking indecent photographs or pseudo photographs of children	1	10 years	0	6 months	0
Making indecent photograph or pseudo photographs of children	10	10 years	0	6 months	0
Total	136				

TABLE 5: NUMBER CONVICTED FOR SEXUAL OFFENCES¹, THE MAXIMUM SENTENCE WHICH CAN BE GIVEN AND THE NUMBER WHO RECEIVED THE MAXIMUM SENTENCE BY OFFENCE 2006

Offence	Total number convicted	On indictment		Summarily	
		Maximum custodial sentence which can be given	Number given maximum custodial sentence	Maximum custodial sentence which can be given	Number given maximum custodial sentence
Rape	11	Life	0	-	-

Offence	Total number convicted	On indictment		Summarily	
		Maximum custodial sentence which can be given	Number given maximum custodial sentence	Maximum custodial sentence which can be given	Number given maximum custodial sentence
Gross indecency with child	5	10 years	0	6 months	0
Buggery with boy under 16 years	3	Life	0	-	-
Unlawful carnal knowledge of a girl under 14 years	3	Life	0	-	-
Unlawful carnal knowledge of a girl under 17 years	5	2 years	1	12 months	0
Incest by man on female	1	7 years	0	-	-
Indecent assault on a female	73	10 years	0	12 months	0
Indecent assault on a male	8	10 years	0	12 months	0
Indecent assault on a female child	2	10 years	0	12 months	0
Indecent exposure ³	6	2 years	0	6 months	0
Exposure	12	2 years	0	6 months	0
Meeting a child following sexual grooming	2	10 years	0	6 months	0
Sex offender failing to notify police of change of address	13	5 years	0	6 months	0

Offence	Total number convicted	On indictment		Summarily	
		Maximum custodial sentence which can be given	Number given maximum custodial sentence	Maximum custodial sentence which can be given	Number given maximum custodial sentence
Breach of interim Sex Offenders Prevention Order	1	5 years	0	6 months	0
Distributing indecent photograph or pseudo photographs of children	1	10 years	0	6 months	0
Making indecent photograph or pseudo photographs of children	15	10 years	0	6 months	0
Total	161				

Notes:

- 1 For some of these offences the maximum penalty may be a term of imprisonment and/or a fine; the imprisonment element has been considered for the tables. It is not possible to determine from the court dataset if an offender received both disposals.
- 2 The maximum penalty is life imprisonment if with a person under 16; five years if other person was over 18 and the defendant was over 21, otherwise the maximum is 2 years. Court conviction data do not contain victim information in relation to offences committed and it is therefore not possible to determine what the maximum penalty for the offence committed should be; life imprisonment has therefore been documented.
- 3 Under the Sexual Offences Act 2003 (which came into effect in May 2004) the maximum penalty for indecent exposure was set in statute to two years on indictment and six months summarily. The maximum penalty under common law (unlimited imprisonment) is given for the years prior to this.

Sectarian Attacks in the Fountain Estate in Londonderry

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) the number of reported sectarian attacks in the vicinity of the Fountain Estate in Londonderry in each of the last three years; (ii) whether a pattern or purpose has been detected in relation to these attacks; and (iii) what consideration has been given to enhancing security in the area.

(AQW 985/11)

Minister of Justice: The PSNI do not hold records of the number of sectarian attacks for the Fountain Estate in the format requested. Police have confirmed that sectarian incidents in the vicinity of the Fountain Estate are initiated by people both within and outside the estate. Over the last few years PSNI has installed 6 CCTV cameras around the Fountain Estate and has worked with various statutory and

non statutory bodies to improve gates /fencing and lighting. The police have assured me that security of the area will continue to be kept under review.

Republican Dissident Activity

Mr S Moutray asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 495/11, whether he has raised the issue of police numbers during his regular discussions with the Chief Constable and his senior officials regarding the current security situation.

(AQW 1008/11)

Minister of Justice: The issue of police numbers is an operational matter for the Chief Constable. However I have discussed the matter with the Chief Constable on a number of occasions, including within the context of discussions on the current security situation, resourcing and the potential implications of the Comprehensive Spending Review. I have been advised there will be a further intake of new recruits to the Training College on 31 October 2010.

Hate Crime

Mr S Anderson asked the Minister of Justice for his Department's definition of a hate crime.

(AQW 1012/11)

Minister of Justice: The definition of a hate crime, as adopted by the Criminal Justice Agencies in Northern Ireland is any incident which constitutes a criminal offence, perceived by the victim or any other person as being motivated by prejudice or hate towards a person's actual or perceived race; faith or religion; sexual orientation; disability; political opinion or gender identity.

Prison Parties

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Justice to detail the number of parties arranged for special occasions or for prisoners entertainment in each prison, in each of the last five years; and the cost of arranging these parties.

(AQW 1048/11)

Minister of Justice: There have been no parties held for prisoners' entertainment during the last five years. The Northern Ireland Prison Service, through its Family Strategy, recognises the key role that the maintenance of strong family ties can play in the effective rehabilitation of prisoners and in reducing re-offending. One of the ways the Service seeks to promote this through Family Days which are arranged by prison visits staff.

Each establishment holds Family Days several times a year, usually during school holidays. Each event can accommodate up to 50 children. In the last five years NIPS have hosted 41 such functions at a total cost over the five years of approximately £23,000.

All of these functions were paid for out of each prison's Governor's Fund. The purpose of the Funds is to provide prisoners with things that would not normally be paid for out of public funds, related to the welfare of all categories of prisoner. The Fund derives from a percentage of profits from prison tuck shops, the sale of goods produced in prisons and from the money prisoners pay for renting televisions; they are not funded from the public purse.

Two other events were held in Maghaberry in 2009. A barbeque was held for a small group of life sentence prisoners and their families to encourage them to utilise skills they have learnt while in custody. A therapeutic social event was also held later that year for vulnerable prisoners. The total cost of both events was £190 which was paid for out of the education budget and the Governor's fund.

Complaints Against Prison Officers

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Justice how many individual prison officers have had multiple complaints made against them by prisoners within the last five years, broken down by number of complaints.

(AQW 1049/11)

Minister of Justice: The information requested is not readily available and could only be compiled at disproportionate cost.

Data Relating to Criminal Convictions

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 701/11 and AQW 616/11, why data relating to criminal convictions, in relation to breaches of Non-Molestation Orders and driving whilst disqualified, are not available for the years following 2006.

(AQW 1061/11)

Minister of Justice: I understand that under the Northern Ireland Office, resource priorities were focused on the development of an integrated information strategy and certain statistical work was paused so that full attention could be given to that. Steps are now being taken as a matter of urgency to derive and validate the databases for prosecutions and convictions subsequent to 2006.

Domestic Violence

Mr P Maskey asked the Minister of Justice whether there are any differences in approach under his Department's strategy between domestic violence perpetrated by men and domestic violence perpetrated by women.

(AQW 1113/11)

Minister of Justice: The 'Tackling Violence at Home' strategy for addressing domestic violence and abuse in Northern Ireland was launched in October 2005 by the Northern Ireland Office and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety. The strategy is gender neutral and recognises that domestic violence occurs right across our society.

In setting out the Government's vision for tackling domestic violence and abuse the strategy aims to hold perpetrators to account for their behaviour. Domestic violence can be perpetrated by both males and females but it is worth noting that the gender breakdown of domestic violence offenders under PBNi supervision is 91% male and 9% female. PBNi deliver groupwork programmes for male perpetrators of domestic violence and is currently rolling out a new groupwork programme, the Integrated Domestic Violence Programme (IDAP), throughout Northern Ireland, in partnership with NI Women's Aid. This is an accredited offending behaviour programme consisting of 27 groupwork sessions and additional individual sessions.

In the UK and Ireland there is no accredited programme for female perpetrators of domestic violence. PBNi carry out individual assessment and tailor one-to-one interventions to address the particular needs of female offenders to prevent further offending.

Search Facility for Separated Prisoners at Maghaberry Prison

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 91/11, what equipment will be installed in the new search facility for separated prisoners at Maghaberry Prison; and when the facility will be operational.

(AQW 1118/11)

Minister of Justice: The equipment being installed in the new search facility for separated prisoners at Maghaberry Prison includes:

- a Rapiscan scanner for the detection of illicit articles contained within outer clothing and foot wear. This is a scanning device, similar to those used in airports throughout the world;

- a Body Orifice Security Scanner (BOSS) chair. This is a chair which will detect any hidden metal contraband contained within the body orifices;
- Prison staff will also use the latest hand held metal detector on all separated prisoners on entering the facility.

The new facility is now in place and is expected to be fully operational by mid November 2010.

Protest in Roe House

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 45/11, how many prisoners have been charged under prison rules following the protest and resultant damage in Roe House, Maghaberry Prison; and with what each prisoner has been charged.

(AQW 1119/11)

Minister of Justice: Charges were laid against 35 prisoners during the protest. The charges were in relation to a number of offences set out in Prison Rule 38 including:

- disobeys any lawful order;
- damages any part of a prison or property not being his own;
- mutinies or commits any act of collective indiscipline;
- commits any other assault;
- assaults an officer or other member of staff ;
- uses threatening, abusive or insulting words or behaviour;
- disobeys or fails to comply with any rules or regulation applying to him;
- attempts to commit any of the foregoing charges
- assault causing injury against any other person including another prisoner; and
- in any other way offends against Good order and Discipline.

In line with recommendation 14 of the Prisoner Ombudsman's report of 11 June, the Governor set aside any outstanding charges incurred by separated prisoners in Roe House in connection with the period from 4 April to 11 June 2010. This amounted to over 600 charges out of the total of 1531

Following the agreement reached on 12 August, the Governor took the decision to set aside most of the remaining charges which had been incurred in relation to the protest, on the grounds that any punishments that may have been awarded, such for example as cellular confinement, could be understood to have been effectively served during the course of the protest.

There are seven remaining charges currently adjourned. Six of these involve one prisoner and felt by the Governor to be of a very serious nature. Due to this they are not being withdrawn and will be processed as per adjudication procedures.

One charge (relating to a matter which was referred to the Police independently) is currently adjourned by NIPS whilst being assessed by the Police to ascertain if a criminal investigation is warranted. In line with procedures, the prison authorities cannot process the adjudication for this charge until the Police inform NIPS of their decision.

Childcare Provision

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) his Department's criteria for any funding of childcare provision; and (ii) how much his Department has invested in childcare provision in each of the last three years, including Sure Start programmes.

(AQW 1121/11)

Minister of Justice: The Department of Justice was established on 12 April 2010. All staff within the DOJ and its Agencies are eligible to join the NICS Salary Sacrifice Scheme (or similar). Details of the relevant scheme are available to all staff. The eligibility to join the scheme is based on personal circumstances of staff. It is, however, estimated that there are approximately 111 staff within the DOJ and its Agencies who are currently participating in the schemes.

The associated costs of the schemes from April to September were approximately £11,300.

City of Culture 2013 in Derry

Mr R McCartney asked the Minister of Justice whether he has identified any funding from his Department's budget to be allocated to the City of Culture 2013 in Derry; and if so, how much and for what specific purpose, projects or programmes in the City of Culture is this money intended.

(AQW 1177/11)

Minister of Justice: There are currently no plans to allocate any of the Department of Justice budget towards funding of projects or programmes for the City of Culture 2013 in Derry.

Compensation Paid to Prison Staff

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how much compensation has been paid to prison staff as a result of assaults and injuries caused by prisoners in each of the last three years.

(AQW 1187/11)

Minister of Justice: Table A below sets out the amount of compensation paid to prison staff as a result of primary assaults i.e., assaults made directly on prison staff by prisoners in each of the last three financial years and the current financial year (2010/11) to 30 September:

TABLE A – PRIMARY ASSAULTS

Year	No of Claims	Total Amount Paid (Direct assault)
07/08	6	£48,189.46
08/09	2	£9,250
09/10	7	£28,289.30
10/11 (April – Sept)	2	£15,750
Total	17	£101,478.76

In addition, payments have also been made for secondary assault i.e. as a result of either the deployment of control and restraint techniques (when an incident of violence by a prisoner requires Control and Restraint techniques to be deployed resulting in injury to prison staff) or smoke inhalation (injuries to prison staff caused by fires). These figures are set out at Tables B and C below respectively.

TABLE B - CONTROL AND RESTRAINT

Year	No of Claims	Total Amount Paid
07/08	3	£16,500

Year	No of Claims	Total Amount Paid
08/09	0	0
09/10	8	£28,862.50
10/11 (April – Sept)	3	£20,339.20
Totals	14	£65,701.70

TABLE C - SMOKE INHALATION

Year	No of Claims	Total Amount Paid
07/08	10	£101,500
08/09	7	£29,318
09/10	0	0
10/11 (April – Sept)	1	£2,255.00
Totals	18	£133,073

It should be noted that the compensation paid in any year may relate to incidents that occurred in previous years.

Inquiry on the Committal of Devidas Paliutis

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 993/11, why the preliminary inquiry on the committal of Devidas Paliutis was held by video-link.

(AQW 1190/11)

Minister of Justice: I understand that the Preliminary Inquiry in this case was held by live video link at the direction of the District Judge (Magistrates' Courts).

Hate Crime

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister of Justice to outline his plans for a review of the law in relation to hate crime and if he will make a statement.

(AQW 1240/11)

Minister of Justice: The legislative provisions underpinning hate crime offences and penalties in Northern Ireland are set out in the Public Order (Northern Ireland) Order 1987 and the Criminal Justice (No2) (Northern Ireland) Order 2004. Whilst I have no plans for a review of these provisions I intend to use the forthcoming consultation on a future Northern Ireland Community Safety Strategy to consider our approach to and outline proposals for addressing hate crime in the future.

There is no place for Hate Crime in our society. My Department works closely with partners such as the PSNI to increase public awareness of all types of hate crime and the harm it causes through initiatives such as the Unite Against Hate campaign. In addition support is provided to victims through practical initiatives such as the Hate Incidents Practical Actions Scheme (HIPA) where in partnership with the PSNI and the NIHE support is provided to victims of hate incidents in their homes, or where an individual's home has been damaged as a result of a hate incident.

Vexatious Litigants

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of whether person's legal proceedings in another jurisdiction should be considered when deciding whether that individual should be declared a vexatious litigant in Northern Ireland.

(AQW 1271/11)

Minister of Justice: Under section 32 of the Judicature (Northern Ireland) Act 1978, the High Court is only to consider proceedings taken by a person in the courts or tribunals in Northern Ireland when determining if a person may be regarded as a vexatious litigant. I have no current plans to amend the legislation.

Review of the Rules on Security

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Justice whether he will be conducting a review of the rules on security for costs in relation to litigation.

(AQW 1272/11)

Minister of Justice: The position on security for costs is governed by statute and court rules. These set out the circumstances in which orders for security for costs can be made and generally provide that the decision on whether or not to make such an order is subject to the court's discretion.

The current system aims to give the courts the flexibility they need to balance rights of access to justice with rights to recover costs. I do not, therefore, have any plans to review the position.

Vexatious Litigants

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Justice if he intends to consult with the appropriate legal authorities and to review whether the current arrangements in place to deal with vexatious litigants are fit for purpose.

(AQW 1273/11)

Minister of Justice: I have no current plans to review the law relating to vexatious litigants.

Vexatious Litigants in England and Wales

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Justice to detail the number of legal proceedings commenced in Northern Ireland in each of the last five years, by persons who have been declared vexatious litigants in England and Wales

(AQW 1274/11)

Minister of Justice: Two people declared vexatious litigants in England and Wales are known to have commenced nine legal proceedings in Northern Ireland in the last five years.

In 2008 one person commenced seven applications and in 2010 one person commenced two proceedings.

Statutory Minimum Sentence

Mr S Moutray asked the Minister of Justice if he will consider introducing a statutory minimum sentence for certain types of serious sexual assault.

(AQW 1296/11)

Minister of Justice: The sentencing framework was radically reshaped in 2008 with the introduction of new indeterminate and extended public protection sentences for serious sexual and violent offences. I keep the sentencing framework under regular review but have no plans at this time to introduce minimum sentences.

Victims of Sectarian Attacks in Rasharkin

Mr M Storey asked the Minister of Justice what meetings he has had, or intends to have, with victims of sectarian attacks in Rasharkin.

(AQW 1337/11)

Minister of Justice: Attacks of this nature have no place in our society and will not be tolerated. While I have not had any meetings to date with the victims of sectarian attacks in Rasharkin, I would be happy to meet with those affected to listen to their concerns.

Sectarian Incidents in Rasharkin

Mr M Storey asked the Minister of Justice whether he has met, or intends to meet, senior PSNI representatives regarding prosecutions for sectarian incidents in Rasharkin.

(AQW 1339/11)

Minister of Justice: Whilst I have regular meetings with the Chief Constable and other senior officers I have not met with them specifically to discuss sectarian attacks in Rasharkin. Prosecutions are a matter for the Public Prosecution Service; the PPS has operational independence and all decisions are based on the available evidence.

The Compensation Agency

Ms D Purvis asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 996/11, why the Compensation Agency does not hold compensation details for injuries relating to the conflict in Northern Ireland separate from other criminal injury claims.

(AQW 1390/11)

Minister of Justice: I am unable to provide the information requested as the Compensation Agency's data base does not identify those claims made in respect of the conflict separately to other general criminal injury or damage claims. The design of the Agency's database dates back to the mid 1980's when the emphasis was on recording the nature of injuries/damage and the amount of compensation paid but not the background to or source of the claims.

Displaced Police Officers Who are in Negative Equity

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the proposals to address the problem of displaced police officers who are in negative equity; and when he expects a final decision to be made.

(AQW 1397/11)

Minister of Justice: In addition to the publicly-funded SPED scheme available through the Department for Social Development, additional arrangements are in place to allow the PSNI and Policing Board to provide public funding to assist police officers who are placed in this position.

Approval has already been given to allow the Policing Board and PSNI to adapt existing arrangements to help police officers who are facing negative equity in these circumstances.

Officials from my Department met on 22 September with representatives from the Policing Board and PSNI to give urgent attention to further concerns which were brought to my attention and I hope to receive a detailed, costed proposal from the Policing Board soon to allow me urgently to consider the matter in more detail.

Anti-Social Behaviour Order

Mr B Wilson asked the Minister of Justice how many councils have issued Anti-Social Behaviour Orders since their introduction, and how many Orders were issued in total in the last year.

(AQO 320/11)

Minister of Justice: The Department of Justice has been notified by the relevant authorities, that is Northern Ireland Housing Executive, District Councils and PSNI of the following;

There have been 122 ASBOs issued in Northern Ireland since their introduction in 2005, of which 5 Councils issued a total of 9 ASBOs.

In 2009 25 ASBOs were issued by the relevant authorities, that is NIHE, Councils and PSNI.

Prisoner Ombudsman

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Justice to outline any plans he has for changing the office of the Prisoner Ombudsman to a statutory body.

(AQO 321/11)

Minister of Justice: I am considering the options for placing the Office of the Prisoner Ombudsman on a statutory footing, in line with the reference in the Hillsborough Castle Agreement on 5 February 2010 to reviewing the powers of the office. I believe that with the devolution of policing and justice we have the opportunity to develop local solutions which better suit the needs of Northern Ireland, taking appropriate account of the need to make the most efficient use of resources.

I have therefore written to the First and Deputy First Ministers seeking their views on how any wider review of Ombudsmen's services, including those of the Assembly Ombudsman, might influence decisions on the future of the Prisoner Ombudsman's office. Once I receive their comments I will be in a better position to make an informed decision on the way forward.

Prisons: Mental Health Services

Mr R McCartney asked the Minister of Justice whether he has raised the issue of mental health provision in prisons with the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety.

(AQO 322/11)

Minister of Justice: I am aware of the high level of prisoners presenting with mental health problems and personality disorders and, in partnership with the Minister of Health, I am committed to providing appropriate mental health services to offenders in custody.

I met the Minister of Health on 7 September. We had a wide-ranging discussion which included delivery of healthcare services, and the needs of those suffering from mental illness. We agreed that both our Departments would work closely together to improve service delivery.

The Prison Service has a strong working partnership with the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust for delivery of healthcare services.

Healthcare provision is also discussed regularly at meetings of the Joint Prison Partnership Board. This is a multi-agency and multi-disciplinary Board and meets bi-monthly to agree strategic and operational priorities and review primary and secondary healthcare services to prisoners across the prison estate.

The issue of mental health provision in prisons is under active consideration by the appropriate professionals and range of strategies and action plans are in place to bring about improvements in the delivery of, for example, psychiatric services and addiction support.

There has been recent additional investment in Mental Health services. Discharge liaison Nurses have been appointed to ensure that those with severe and enduring mental illness are linked back into mainstream mental health services upon leaving prison.

Specialist Addictions Nurses have been appointed to provide substitute prescribing services, drug withdrawal services and to integrate with the ADEPT programme run by Opportunity Youth.

Plans are at an advanced stage to develop a day centre service for our most Vulnerable prisoners and an additional £100,000 has been invested to support this development.

A wide range of training has been made available to both discipline and healthcare staff through the joint appointment of a training specialist in Mental Health.

However I acknowledge that there is more to be done and I am clear that tackling the range of specific needs and problems encountered by prisoners – including providing support and services to those prisoners with mental health problems - is vital if we are to succeed in reducing re-offending rates.

The current review of the Prison Service, which includes all aspects of the management of prisons including healthcare, will also help us ensure that mental health services are targeted to best effect in our prisons.

Prisoner Releases

Mr B Armstrong asked the Minister of Justice who is leading the inquiry into the recent erroneous release of two prisoners.

(AQO 323/11)

Minister of Justice: This is a serious matter and it is vital that lessons are learned to identify procedural weaknesses and to remove the margin for human error. The inquiry is being led by the Prison Service's Deputy Director of Operations. The Chief Inspector of Criminal Justice in Northern Ireland has also agreed to review the Inquiry findings.

Prisoner Releases

Ms M Ritchie asked the Minister of Justice what measures he is introducing to safeguard against the erroneous release of remand prisoners from custody by Prison Service staff.

(AQO 324/11)

Minister of Justice: I have commissioned an inquiry into the two erroneous releases. A number of immediate safeguards have already been introduced across the Service including:

- documentation between videolink facilities and the General Offices within the Northern Ireland Prison Service has been improved;
- a strengthening of staff capability in this area;
- videolink forms are now retained on custody files for subsequent checking;
- The "expected warrants list" is checked against the videolink forms received to ensure that none are missing;
- processes are now in place for a second and third level check for all discharges;
- all checks are now done using live screens containing the most up to date information; and
- Prisoner Escort and Court Custody Service (PECCS) staff have been instructed that prisoners are not to be released from the dock but taken to the custody suite for a final check.

Department for Regional Development

NI Water Staff

Mr G Savage asked the Minister for Regional Development to list all current and previous employment agencies that have supplied staff to NI Water since April 2007; and to outline the contract details and value of these contracts.

(AQW 650/11)

Minister for Regional Development (Mr C Murphy): I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that temporary staff have been supplied under the following tender references:

- C179 Provision of Temporary workers for Water Service - May 2005 to July 2009 (Kennedy Recruitment);
- C212 Provision of Temporary Engineering Technicians - September 2003 to July 2009 (Grafton / Blueprint);
- 3.C100 Supply of Technicians for Engineering Support in the Fields of Telecommunications and Telemetry – June 2001 to June 2009 (Orion Engineering Services Limited);

- Central Procurement Directorate (CPD) Contract Reference S/13124/03 – March 2005 to March 2008 (Diamond Recruitment, Sellick Partnership, Grafton Recruitment);
- CPD Contract Reference F/15175/06 – March 2008 to date (Diamond Recruitment, Sellick Partnership, Grafton Recruitment, Kennedy Recruitment, Premier People); and
- C348 Temporary Workers and Temporary Engineering Technicians – July 2009 to date (Premiere People).

NIW also had agency staff engaged through Inta People, MPA, Office Angels, Reed, Spengler Fox, Brightwater, Alexander HR, Vector Resourcing, and DP Contracting. These suppliers were used in the instance that the requirement could not be filled through the contractual arrangements listed above. A number of the supply agreements were operational prior to go live in April 2007. These legacy agreements were subsequently managed by NIW.

During November 2008, NIW began work on a new tender to cover temporary labour requirements. The tender was launched in March 2009 and the tender award was made with a start date of July 2009. The resulting contract award (C348 – Premiere People) transferred temporary staff from Inta People, MPA, Office Angels, Reed, Kennedy Recruitment, Grafton Recruitment and Blueprint in to one contractual agreement.

Spend detail with agencies is listed in the table below:

	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11 to date	Total
	£	£	£	£	£
Premiere People	83,774.97	40,960.87	664,004.47	308,344.47	1,097,084.78
Kennedy Recruitment	782,793.76	699,877.10	297,871.01	0	1,780,541.87
Grafton	320,111.35	369,991.87	364,709.98	10,123.69	1,064,936.89
Blueprint	330,954.92	185,072.44	18,304.37	0	534,331.73
Diamond	1,225.74	17,686.95	5,296.91	0	24,209.60
Sellick Partnership	287,472.71	170,906.69	47,580.29	0	505,959.69
Spengler Fox	34,564.13	0	0	0	34,564.13
Orion Engineering Services	615,216.70	537,934.79	177,057.45	38,535.73	1,368,744.67
Inta People	233,910.00	125,775.00	12,150.00	0	371,835.00
MPA	101,596.05	304,573.86	125,262.13	0	531,432.04
Office Angels	0	34,528.51	9,308.27	0	43,836.78
Reed	6,330.72	44,743.97	10,402.21	0	61,476.90
Alexander HR Ltd	116,091.23	103,012.70	0	0	219,103.93
Vector Resourcing Ltd	52,700.00	311,916.23	275,915.00	36,500.00	677,031.23

	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11 to date	Total
	£	£	£	£	£
DP Contracting Ltd	120,642.90	47,793.75	3,150.00	0	171,586.65
Brightwater Recruitment Ltd	18,622.05	18,596.90	48,579.46	(i)16,791.00	102,589.41
Total	3,106,007.23	3,013,371.63	2,059,591.55	410,294.89	8,589,265.30

- (i) The spend in 2010-11 relates to one individual. A fee of £4,500 would have been payable if the individual had been transferred to the new contract C348. The position was only required short term. The assignment remained with Brightwater to completion to avoid the fee applicable upon transfer. The temporary assignment was terminated in July 2010.

Roads Service's Limavady Section Office

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the annual cost of (i) rent; and (ii) utility bills for the Roads Service's Limavady Section Office in each of the last three years.

(AQW 841/11)

Minister for Regional Development: I can advise that my Department's Roads Service is not charged for rent in respect of Limavady Section Office, as the building is owned by the Department of Finance and Personnel. With regard to utility bills, these are listed in the table below.

Year	Rates	Electricity	Telephone	Heating	Water	Cleaning	Waste disposal
2007/2008	£6,290	£1,694	£5,264	£2,200*	£122	£2,127	£120
2008/2009	£6,445	£1,694	£3,157	£2,200*	£102	£1,981	£120
2009/2010	£6,763	£1,906	£3,834	£2,200*	£280	£1,952	£120

* the figure quoted is based on average fuel usage and price over the period

Bus Shelters

Ms A Lo asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) what measures and resources Translink currently has in place to maintain existing bus shelters and install new bus shelters when required; and (ii) if there are any plans to reduce these measure or resources.

(AQW 890/11)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service entered into a contract with Adshel, the bus shelter provider, for the provision of bus shelters throughout the various council areas across the North. During the last 10 years, this contract has provided over 1300 bus shelters across the North.

The provision and the maintenance of bus shelters are funded by Adshel through advertising revenue, at no cost to the Department, and this will continue until the contract terminates in 2015.

While the current contract does not allow for the provision of new shelters after 2010, Roads Service can provide additional shelters when they are considered necessary. However, any such project would be required to be prioritised against other competing schemes for the limited funding available.

I can further advise that local councils can also provide bus shelters when they wish to do so.

Parking Meters

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister for Regional Development why his Department withdrew parking meters that accepted credit and debit cards.

(AQW 906/11)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that a number of credit card enabled pay and display machines, which had reached the end of their economic lifespan, were replaced over the last year with machines that accept payment by coin only.

I should explain that the customer experience with the credit card facility was that it was relatively slow and less than ideal in the outdoor environment. When chip and pin technology was introduced, it was considered that this process would have been further slowed, as any new installations would require customers to input their PIN numbers.

Given the previous experience of customers and the very low usage of the credit card facility, approximately 3% of all transactions, my Department could not justify the significant additional expenditure required to include the credit card facility on the replacement machines. In addition to the capital outlay for the equipment, my Department was also required to pay all associated costs for each credit/debit card transaction.

However, I can advise that officials in my Department are currently investigating alternative cashless parking payment options.

Parking Meters

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister for Regional Development the cost to his Department of installing new parking meters in each of the last three years.

(AQW 907/11)

Minister for Regional Development: Over the past three years, my Department's Roads Service has installed and replaced a considerable number of pay and display machines throughout the North. Details of the costs incurred for this process are shown in the table below:

Financial Year	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
Total Cost	£407,553.85	£535,062.36	£1,033,185.75

Extended Contracts

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 417/11, for how long the Roads Service and Translink contracts were extended and the cost of each extended contract.

(AQW 910/11)

Minister for Regional Development: The position in respect of Roads Service is as follows:

The Roads Service contract extension in 2007/2008 was for legal advice on adjudication of contractual disputes. In dealing with dispute resolution, the length of time taken and the cost of the associated fees are dependent on the nature of the specific dispute. It is not possible to estimate this accurately. The contract extension operated over the period June 2007 to February 2010 and the associated costs were £547,245. Work under the initial instruction for the legal advice commenced in January 2006 and was completed in April 2007, at a cost of £388,000.

The two Roads Service contracts in 2009/10 were extended due to legal contractual issues which were preventing the award of new contracts. The first was a two year Term Contract for Maintenance and Improvement of Street Lighting, which was extended for a further 10 months. The value of the works undertaken over the extended period was £11.5 million. The original estimated annual value at the pre-award stage was £8.6 million. The second was a five year Term Contract for Maintenance and Improvement of Structures, which was extended for a further 11 months. The value of the works

undertaken over the extended period was £2.6 million. The original estimated annual value at the pre-award stage was £1.8 million.

The volume of work carried out from year to year, and indeed quarters, on term contracts is dictated by operational demands and can vary considerably.

The position in relation to Translink is as follows:

Pension advisers: Translink have informed me that there has been a longstanding arrangement with pension advisers but have been unable to establish when this arrangement formally commenced. The amount of spend has varied from year to year, dependent on the services required. The average annual spend over the last three years was £96,000. A procurement process for pensions advisers commenced in early July 2010 with anticipated completion by mid 2011.

Legal services: The delay in renewing contracts for legal services relates to Translink's Claims & Liability Legal Services. This was competitively tendered and was due for renewal in 2007. Average annual expenditure over the last three years was approximately £130,000.

Translink have also operated a number of ad-hoc arrangements with firms of solicitors for which records of a tender process cannot be located. The amount of spending on these arrangements is estimated at approximately £160,000 per annum over the last three years. All of these arrangements will be discontinued and proposals for procurement will be brought to the October NITHC Board meeting, after which formal procurement is expected to commence.

Contract Extensions

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 417/11, to detail the cost of the Translink and Roads Service single tender actions and whether these were approved by his Department.

(AQW 911/11)

Minister for Regional Development:

(i) The cost of Roads Service single tender actions are set out in the table below and were approved.

External Consultant Commissions let through Single Tender Action			
Project	Financial Year	Start Date	Value
NISTRM Growth Factors	2007/08	May-07	£2,025
Advice to RS Board on RPA	2005/06	Jan-06	£10,000
Development of Business Case and Economic Appraisal for Moving Traffic Offences	2005/06	Feb-06	£20,000
Sustrans Research	2005/06	2005/06	£26,555

(ii) In relation to cost of single tender actions entered into by the NI Transport Holding Company (NITHC) I would refer you to AQW 416/11. The contracts referred to in AQW 416/11 dated after September 2007, were formally approved by the Department after considering the justification put forward by NITHC. NITHC received Centre of Procurement Expertise status during 2007.

Review into Procurement Practice at Translink

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 416/11, whether the review into procurement practice at Translink is being carried out independently or by the Department; and who is leading the review.

(AQW 913/11)

Minister for Regional Development: The review of procurement practice was commissioned by the Northern Ireland Transport Holding Company (NITHC) Group Chief Executive/Accounting Officer to ensure that procedures are in line with best practice and comply with procurement policy. The review is being led by the NITHC Procurement Manager. It is being monitored by the NITHC Audit Committee and Board.

Translink Single Tender Action and Contract Extension

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister for Regional Development whether the Translink single tender action and contract extension was taken into consideration when awarding Translink the Centre of Procurement Expertise status.

(AQW 914/11)

Minister for Regional Development: The Northern Ireland Transport Holding Company (NITHC), which includes subsidiary companies trading jointly as Translink, was awarded Centre of Procurement Expertise (CoPE) status in 2007. This process is overseen by the Central Procurement Directorate within the Department of Finance and Personnel and by a Procurement Board involving departments. I am aware that CoPE status is reviewed every three years and that an independent review, which involved NITHC, was carried out in 2009. This review involved assessment against a range of criteria and NITHC retains its status as a CoPE.

Illegal Sectarian Signage

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans his Department has to remove the illegal sectarian signage from his Department's property in the South Tyrone area, including at the Ballygawley roundabout and Eglish.

(AQW 922/11)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the removal of politically motivated advertising signs in the North is a matter that needs to be treated with sensitivity, and with due regard to the safety of those who may be asked to undertake the removal. The risk of escalating the problem also needs to be taken into consideration.

Roads Service has, however, indicated that it will remove some of the signs referred to, where it is considered safe to do so, and where an adverse reaction is not anticipated.

Stockpile Grit

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development what action he is taking to stockpile grit for use this winter.

(AQW 935/11)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that as part of the preparations for the winter period, salt barns which are strategically placed in depots throughout the North are being filled to capacity. This will result in Roads Service stockpiling some 65,000 tonnes of salt that will be available for use this winter period.

40mph Speed Limit

Mr D Kinahan asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the criteria used to introduce a 40mph speed limit.

(AQW 945/11)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that in April of this year, it introduced a new policy on the setting of local speed limits. This policy is based on the Department for Transport's guidelines.

With regard to the 40mph speed limits, the policy states that: "Roads suitable for 40 mph are generally higher quality suburban roads or those on the outskirts of urban areas where there is little development. They are roads which generally provide a through traffic or strategic function and should have good width and layout, parking and waiting restrictions in operation, and buildings set back from the road. These roads should, wherever possible, cater for the needs of non-motorised road users through segregation of road space. Alternatively, traffic managers should consider whether there are convenient alternative routes available and ensure that any roads with a 40 mph limit have adequate footways and crossing places as necessary for pedestrians, cyclists and equestrians".

Historically, Roads Service has provided 40mph speed limits when frontage development reached 50%, measured along either one or both sides of the road, within a 600 metre length of carriageway. Existing vehicle speeds within the area are also considered and, when the average speed recorded was at or below 40mph, this would be assessed as a supporting factor for a reduced limit.

Traffic Lights in the Mallusk Road and Mayfield Link

Mr T Burns asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail any recent changes made to the traffic lights in the Mallusk Road and Mayfield Link area; and whether any changes made were as a result of the ongoing work on Scullions Road on the approach to the Sandyknowes roundabout.
(AQW 972/11)

Minister for Regional Development: I am advised that as a result of the Scullions Road resurfacing work, Roads Service's Traffic Information and Control Centre (TICC) investigated the impact of the work on the signalised junctions at Mallusk Road / Scullions Road and Scullions Road / Sandyknowes Roundabout.

The operation of these lights is governed by the operation of vehicle detector loops located in the carriageway. To facilitate resurfacing work, it is normal practice to temporarily deactivate the traffic detection in the carriageway until the work is completed.

To ensure the signal timings at these junctions remained responsive to prevailing traffic conditions during the works, an alternative method of traffic detection was installed at both locations. This was a temporary solution to enable the junctions to operate as efficiently as possible.

The junctions have now returned to normal operation following completion of the works.

I can also advise that recently, TICC, in response to feedback from road users and having observed the operation of the junction of the Mallusk Rd / Scullions Rd / Mayfield Link, increased the green time on the Mayfield Link to allow for a higher throughput of traffic.

Traffic Flow Survey at Mayfield Link

Mr T Burns asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the date and the results of the most recent traffic flow survey at Mayfield Link on the approach to the Sandyknowes roundabout.
(AQW 973/11)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has not carried out any detailed traffic flow surveys for the Mayfield Link therefore it cannot provide the information requested.

Contracts Between NI Water and Enterprise PLC

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the contracts between NI Water and Enterprise PLC in (i) 2006/07; (ii) 2007/08; (iii) 2008/09; and (iv) 2009/10, including expenditure and whether the contracts were by single tender action or extended contract.
(AQW 981/11)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that its predecessor Water Service awarded a contract to Enterprise Managed Services Ltd in January 2007. This award followed a competitive market tender exercise.

In line with the original contract award terms, the contract option to extend was exercised by NIW for the year 1 April 2008 to 31 March 2009. A further extension was granted from 1 April 2009 to 31 March 2010. The contract with Enterprise ceased following a further market tendered competition for the services provided.

A breakdown of expenditure for each year is provided in the table below.

Enterprise Managed Services Ltd. – Expenditure on Contract			
2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
£77,009	£608, 208	£2, 505, 455	£827, 905

Single Tender Actions and Contract Extensions

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 417/11 and AQW 416/11, when work commenced on the single tender actions and the contract extensions at Translink; and when authorisation was granted by his Department.
(AQW 984/11)

Minister for Regional Development: In respect of the Single Tender Actions reported in AQW 416/11, the dates when work commenced and authorisation was granted are contained in the table below:

Financial Year	Date of internal Translink approval	Date of authorisation by the Department	Date work commenced	Project	Amount
2006/07	May 2006	No record of Departmental approval	June 2006	Carrying out TPWS risk assessment	£4,025
2007/08	Sep. 2007	No record of Departmental approval	October 2007	Specialist design contractor for earthworks examination programme	£20,000
2007/08	Feb. 2008	Approved March 2008	March 2008	Bangor TEMPL5 TDM system replacement project	£120,311
2007/08	Feb. 2008	Approved March 2008	March 2008	Safe and secure storage of master records	£15,500
2008/09	May 2008	Approved June 2008	Project did not proceed	Provision of miniature warning lights (MSL) at UWC XD263 (Robinson's)	£85,050

Financial Year	Date of internal Translink approval	Date of authorisation by the Department	Date work commenced	Project	Amount
2008/09	Jun. 2008	Approved December 2008	December 2008	Dualling of train describer system	£169,241
2008/09	Jul. 2008	Approved August 2008	September 2008	Antrim Station signalling improvements	£14,782

In respect of the Contract Extensions reported in AQW 417/11, Translink have informed me that (i) there has been a longstanding arrangement with pension advisers but have been unable to establish when this arrangement formally commenced, and (ii) the Claims & Liability Legal Services were competitively tendered and were due for renewal in 2007.

In line with the Management Statement and Financial Memorandum such contract extensions do not require departmental approval.

Roads Resurfaced in the Lisburn City Council Area

Mr P Givan asked the Minister for Regional Development how many miles of road were resurfaced in the Lisburn City council area, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 986/11)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the total road lane length resurfaced in kilometres, for the Lisburn City Council area, for the last five financial years is set out in the table below:-

Financial Year	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
Road Lane Length (kilometres)	63.4	27.6	42.0	30.8	37.6

Public Transport

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans his Department has to encourage car users to use public transport in the North Down area.

(AQW 990/11)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's plans for North Down are included in the Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan. The Plan provides for, and encourages, greater use of public transport and includes proposals for improved bus and rail services, Park and Ride and Rapid Transit.

Recent investment in the purchase of new modern buses which will be used across the region will also bring benefits to the North Down area. Additionally my Department is providing the funding to allow Translink to purchase 20 new trains, the first of which should be in service by 2012. Some of these trains will be deployed on the Belfast to Bangor line in order to increase the frequency and capacity of services on the line. The new trains and buses provide a real and attractive alternative to the private car and will help to encourage car users to use public transport.

My Department is also currently developing a new pilot Rapid Transit system in Belfast. It is proposed that this will include the provision of Park and Ride facilities at key locations. One of the proposed Rapid Transit routes will link East Belfast to the city centre and will include a Park and Ride facility in the Dundonald area. It is anticipated that some car users from North Down will use this facility.

The Travelwise initiative run by my Department continues to promote sustainable modes of transport in all sectors across the North including more use of public transport, car sharing, walking and cycling.

Information about the range of Travelwise initiatives can be found at www.travelwiseni.com.

Road Calming Measures for the Ballymacconnell Road in Bangor

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the proposed road calming measures for the Ballymacconnell Road in Bangor.

(AQW 991/11)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has confirmed with the Member's constituency office that this question relates to Ballymacconnell Road South in Bangor.

Roads Service has completed the required legislative and consultative processes for providing traffic calming measures on this road. However, a number of objections to the proposals have been received, which Roads Service has been unable to resolve to date. It is now considering how best to proceed and I have asked Mr Ken Hutton, acting Divisional Roads Manager for Eastern Division, to write to you with an update, when a decision on the way forward has been taken.

Road Markings

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the cost of renewing road markings in each of the last three financial years.

(AQW 992/11)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service does not monitor expenditure specifically in relation to renewal of road markings, however, the following table provides details of the total expenditure for each of the last three years for renewal of road markings and reflective road studs (cat's eyes).

	Northern Division	Southern Division	Eastern Division	Western Division	Roads Service Total
2007/08	£592,000	£620,000	£507,000	£391,000	£2,110,000
2008/09	£503,000	£585,000	£543,000	£380,000	£2,011,000
2009/10	£566,000	£592,000	£485,000	£459,000	£2,102,000

Neighbourhood Renewal

Ms J McCann asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the services currently funded, fully or partly, by his Department under Neighbourhood Renewal in the West Belfast constituency.

(AQW 1002/11)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it has not funded, either fully or in part, any services under the Neighbourhood Renewal within West Belfast.

Contracts Awarded by NI Water and the Water Service

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail all contracts awarded by NI Water and the Water Service in each of the last six years, including to whom the contract was awarded and cost.

(AQW 1056/11)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that the contracts set out in the tables below have been awarded by it or its predecessor Water Service to the suppliers detailed. Contract details are split between Operational covering the past six years (table 1) and Capital covering the period from April 2007 (table 2). Capital contract details prior to April 2007

and the costs associated with all of the operational contracts are not held by NIW in a format that is readily accessible and could only be extracted following a major manual exercise. This information could therefore only be provided at disproportionate cost.

TABLE 1 OPERATIONAL GOODS AND SERVICES CONTRACTS AWARDED FROM 1 APRIL 2004

Tender No	Tender Title	Successful Suppliers	Date of Award
C004	Plastic Pipes & Fittings	Glynwed Pipe Systems Ltd	01/04/2004
		WE Bullick	
		Hepworth	
		Associated Pipeline Products	
		Wavin	
		Fusion Provida	
		Tyco (Atlantic Plastics Ltd)	
		Uponor	
		Plasson	
		Total Pipeline	
C004-08	Pipes & Fittings	ASSOCIATED PIPELINE PRODUCTS LIMITED	11/03/2008
		Burdens	
		Glynwed Pipe Systems	
		WAVIN (NI) LIMITED	
C006	Surface Boxes and Manhole Cover (Castings)	Associated Pipeline Products Ltd	01/04/2004
		Cavanagh Foundry Ltd	
		JP Corry (NI) Ltd	
C006-07	Surface Boxes and Manhole Cover (Castings)	ASSOCIATED PIPELINE PRODUCTS LIMITED	20/08/2007
C007-05	Cold water meters	ELSTER METERING LIMITED	
C007-08	Cold Water Meters and AMR	Sensus Metering Systems	18/06/2009
C009	Mechanical Joints & Fittings	Atlantic Plastics Ltd.,	01/09/2005
		Viking Johnston,	
C010-05	Supply & Dly of Underground Stopcocks, Stopcock/ Meter Chamber Systems & Plumbing Materials	Atlantic Plastics Ltd	01/04/2005
C011	Under Pressure Water Fittings	TYCO VALVES LTD	01/09/2005
C012	Hydraulic control valves and fittings	Associated Pipelines Products Ltd	01/04/2004

Tender No	Tender Title	Successful Suppliers	Date of Award
		Atlantic Plastics Ltd	
		IPL Group	
		Saint Gobain Pipelines Plc	
C012-08	Hydraulic control valves and fittings	ASSOCIATED PIPELINE PRODUCTS LIMITED	22/07/2008
		GA Valves Sales Ltd	
		IPL GROUP	
C014-04	Herbicides	N2N Enviro Ltd	01/04/2004
C013-05	Chemicals	CCP GRANSDEN (BI-CHEM) LTD	01/07/2005
		CHEMIFLOC (UK) LTD	
		Chem-vite Ltd	
		ISYS ENVIRONMENTAL	
		KILWAUGHTER CHEMICAL CO LTD	
		PREMIER SCIENTIFIC LTD	
		Tennant Midgley Group Ltd	
		Albion Chemical	
		Walker Eurosalt	
		BOC Gases	
		Ineos Chlor Ltd	
		Bio Industries Ltd	
		Central Chemical Supplies Ltd	
		Norit UK Ltd	
		Anachem Ireland Ltd	
C013-08	Supply and Delivery of Chemicals	CCP GRANSDEN (BI-CHEM) LTD	01/01/2009
		CHEMIFLOC (UK) LTD	
		Chem-vite Ltd	
		ISYS ENVIRONMENTAL	
		KILWAUGHTER CHEMICAL CO LTD	
		PREMIER SCIENTIFIC LTD	
		TENNANT METALLURGICAL GROUP LTD	
C018-08	Collection and Disposal of Waste by Skip	BRICKKILN WASTE LIMITED	01/11/2008

Tender No	Tender Title	Successful Suppliers	Date of Award
C019-07	Hire of Vehicles and Plant	D&J FEE (CONTRACTS)	03/09/2007
		GERALD G MCMAHON	
		IRISH WASTE SERVICES LTD	
		JOHN ANDERSON	
		KPL CONTRACTS LTD	
		LESLIE MCGUCKIN	
		LOWRY BROS LTD	
		MONAGHAN CONTRACTS LTD	
		MORROW CONTRACTS LTD	
		NOEL R REID	
		O'NEILL CONTRACTS	
		RS Greer	
		WG KILLOUGH	
C020-04	Sludge Tankering	Irish Waste Services	01/04/2004
		Curran Waste	
		Road Safety Contracts	
		William Thompson & Son	
C020	Sludge Tankering	Road Safety Contracts	18/05/2007
		Irish waste	
		W Thompson & Sons	
		Precision Industrial services	
C022-04	Concrete Products	Tullyleek Precast Concrete Ltd	01/04/2004
C022-07	Concrete Products	Tullyleek Precast Concrete Ltd	
C036	Laboratory Consumables	Davidson & Hardy Ltd	01/04/2005
		Laboratory Supplies & Instruments Ltd.	
		AGB Scientific Apparatus Ltd	
		ISYS Environmental	
		Premier Scientific Ltd	
		CCP Gransden Ltd	
		Technopath (Distribution) Ltd	
C037-04	Chlorination Equipment and Spare Parts	Williams Industrial Services Ltd	01/04/2004

Tender No	Tender Title	Successful Suppliers	Date of Award
		Chemfeed Ltd (Wallace & Tiernan)	
		Severn Trent Water Purification Ltd	
		Alpha Technologies NI Ltd	
C037-07	Chlorination Equipment and Spare Parts	CCP GRANSDEN (BI-CHEM) LTD	27/11/2007
		Davidson & Hardy	
		ISYS ENVIRONMENTAL	
		LABORATORY SUPP & INSTS LTD	
		PREMIER SCIENTIFIC LTD	
		TECHNO-PATH (DISTRIBUTION) LTD	
		Siemens (Chemfeed) Ltdd	
		WILLIAMS IND SERVICES LTD	
C041-05	Reinstatement of road openings	O'Neill Contracts	01/04/2004
		Maurice Flynn & Sons Ltd	
		Noel Monaghan Contracts	
		Whitemountain Surfacing Ltd	
		Morrow Contracts Ltd	
		Gibson Quarries (Banbridge) Ltd	
		RP Tarmac Services	
		William Curry	
C044-04	Miscellaneous Mechanical Sundries	Rotary Bearing & Transmission	01/04/2004
		Associated Pipeline Products	
		Super Spares Ltd	
C044-07	Miscellaneous Mechanical Sundries	Anchor Engineering	01/08/2007
		ASSOCIATED PIPELINE PRODUCTS LIMITED	
		MARTIN ENGINEERING SUPPLIES LTD	
C045-04	Micellaneous Electrical Sundries	Gordons Electrical Supplies	01/04/2004

Tender No	Tender Title	Successful Suppliers	Date of Award
C045-07	Miscellaneous Electrical Sundries	Gordons Electrical Supplies	01/06/2007
C046-04	Hosepipes	WJ Nelson	01/04/2004
		Arco Ltd	
C051	Repair of Sewers using Trenchless Techniques	Environmental Techniques Ltd	01/11/2006
C054-04	Repair & Servicing of Generator Sets	Edina Manufacturing Ltd	01/04/2004
C054-07	Servicing, Repairs and Modifications to Generator Sets	AC Automation	16/10/2007
C055	Supply, Maintenance, Testing and Certification of Lifting Equipment	Yale Industrial Products Limited	01/07/2005
		W H SCOTT & SONS (ENGRS) LTD	
C055-08	Supply, Maintenance, Testing and Certification of Lifting Equipment	YALE INDUSTRIAL PRODUCTS	01/02/2009
C056-04	Heavy Mechanical Maintenance	Allgo Engineerings Ltd	01/04/2004
		Robert Craig & Sons (Engineering) Ltd	
		Weir Engineering Services	
		SSP Pumps Ltd	
C056-07	Heavy Mechanical Maintenance	FIN ENGINEERING GROUP	09/07/2007
		MALLUSK ENGINEERING LTD	
		RJ SMYTH ENGINEERING LTD	
C057	Light Mechanical Maintenance	LOWRY BROS	01/09/2005
		SHAW AUTOMATION	
		TOT TECHNICAL	
		SPRATT & CO	
		FM ENVIRONMENTAL	
		RJ SMYTH	
		ST JOHN'S FOUNDRY	
		M&M STEEL FABRICATIONS	

Tender No	Tender Title	Successful Suppliers	Date of Award
C058-04	Electrical Installation & Repair Work	Thrige Scott Ltd	01/04/2004
		Williams Industrial Services Ltd	
		J Irwin Electrical Services Ltd	
		AJ Clarke Electrical	
		Grants Electrical Services (NI) Ltd	
		Little Electrical Engineering	
C058-07	Electrical Installation and Repair Work	AJ Clarke	13/12/2007
		GRANTS ELECTRICAL SERVICES (NI) LTD	
		IRWIN ELECTRICAL SERVICES LTD	
		LITTLE ELECTRICAL ENGINEERING PRODUCTS	
		SCOTTS ELECTRICAL SERVICES LIMITED	
		SHAW AUTOMATION COMPANY	
		TES (NI) LTD	
		WILLIAMS IND SERVICES LTD	
C059-04	Repairing and Rewinding of Electric Motors	GRANTS ELECTRICAL SERVICES (NI) LTD	01/04/2004
		Little Electrical Engineers Ltd	
		JJ Loughran	
		Thrige - Scott Ltd	
C059-08	Repairing and Rewinding of Electric Motors	GRANTS ELECTRICAL SERVICES (NI) LTD	24/11/2008
C060-04	Process Instruments and Automatic Control Equipment	ASHDALE ENGINEERING LTD	01/04/2004
		ISYS ENVIRONMENTAL	
		JDB Instrumentation	
		PARK ELECTRICAL SERVICES	
		PARTECH (ELECTRONICS) LTD	
		PROCESS MEASUREMENT & ANALYSIS LTD	
		SHAW AUTOMATION COMPANY	

Tender No	Tender Title	Successful Suppliers	Date of Award
		WILLIAMS IND SERVICES LTD	
		Burdens	
		Little Electrical Engineering Ltd	
		Pollution & Process Monitoring Ltd	
		ABB Ltd	
		AJ Hurst	
		DD Butler	
C060-07	Process Instruments and Automatic Control Equipment	ASHDALE ENGINEERING LTD	03/12/2007
		ISYS ENVIRONMENTAL	
		JDB ENVIRONMENTAL LTD	
		PARK ELECTRICAL SERVICES	
		PARTECH (ELECTRONICS) LTD	
		PROCESS MEASUREMENT & ANALYSIS LTD	
		SHAW AUTOMATION COMPANY	
		WILLIAMS IND SERVICES LTD	
C061-04	Manufacture of and Modification to Instrument and Switch Panels	EPS ENVIRONMENTAL LTD	01/04/2004
		EURO CONTROL PANEL SPECIALISTS (ECPS)	
		SHAW AUTOMATION COMPANY	
		TES (NI) LTD	
		WILLIAMS IND SERVICES LTD	
		LMP Controls Ltd	
		R & R Engineering Ltd	
C061-07	Manufacture of and Modification to Instrument and Switch Panels	EPS ENVIRONMENTAL LTD	27/11/2007
		EURO CONTROL PANEL SPECIALISTS (ECPS)	
		SHAW AUTOMATION COMPANY	
		TES (NI) LTD	
		WILLIAMS IND SERVICES LTD	

Tender No	Tender Title	Successful Suppliers	Date of Award
C062-04	Maintenance of Chlorination Equipment	Williams Industrial Services Ltd	01/04/2004
C062-07	Maintenance of Chlorine Equipment	SIEMENS WATER TECHNOLOGIES	01/10/2007
C070-04	Execution of Painting & Decoration Work	Eden Decorators	01/04/2004
C071-04	Supply of Techs for Maintenance of Equipt.in the field of Telemetry	Williams Industrial Services	01/04/2004
		Irwin Group	
C071-07	Supply of Techs for Maintenance of Equipt.in the fields of Instrumentation/ Radio/Telemetry	WILLIAMS IND SERVICES LTD	01/10/2007
C072-05	Waste Water Quality Analysis	Analytical & Environmental Services	01/04/2005
C075	Provision of Security Guarding Services	Security Service Ni Ltd	01/11/2005
C077	Water Quality Analysis	AES Ltd	01/01/2006
C079-04	Supply & Delivery of Digital Microwave Radio Equipment	TS Communication Service	01/04/2004
		TTI Services Ltd	
		Westica Ltd	
C081	De-Sludging of Septic Tanks	Road Safety Contracts	01/04/2004
C081-07	De-Sludging of Septic Tanks	PRECISION INDUSTRIAL SERVICES LIMITED	01/04/2007
		Road Safety Contracts	
C087	Provision of Work Study Practitioners	PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP	01/07/2007
C103	Accounting & Financial Systems Support	PWC	01/02/2006
		Deloitte & Touche	
		Helm Corporation	
C107	Water Quality Samples	SERCO SERVICES	01/04/2006
C110-05	Supply, delivery and Commissioning of Low Capacity Telemetry Outstations	Churchill Controls	01/04/2005

Tender No	Tender Title	Successful Suppliers	Date of Award
C111-05	Supply & Delivery of Self Contained Breathing Apparatus	Draeger Safety UK Ltd	01/04/2005
C115	Supply of Electricity to Water Service Sites	ESB Independent Energy	01/04/2005
C115	Supply of Electricity to Water Service Sites	ESB Independent Energy	01/04/2007
C122-05	Supply and Delivery of Cryptosporidia Sampling Equipment (Filter Modules and Membranes)	Technopath Distribution Ltd	01/04/2004
C124-04	Collection, Transportation and Disposal of De-Watered Sludge from Water Treatment Works	Irish Waste Services Ltd	22/10/2007
C131	Laying of Watermains in Housing Developments	Frank Owens	22/05/2006
C133-07	Supply and Delivery of Bottled Water	ROCWELL NATURAL MINERAL WATER	01/04/2007
C136-05	Reservoir Cleaning	Epsco	01/04/2004
C138-04	Maintenance & Development of NIW Telephone Network	British Telecommunications	01/04/2004
C138-07	Maintenance & Development of NIW Telephone Network	Damovo Ireland	29/10/2007
C139-08	Supply, Delivery of Leakage Control Panels, Kiosks and Associated Equipment	EPS ENVIRONMENTAL LTD	01/01/2009
C140-05	Leakage management services	Halcrow Water Services Ltd	01/04/2005
C140	Leakage Management Services	Crowder & Co	01/06/2008
C142-05	Inspection of Lifting equipment and Pressure Systems	BUREAU VERITAS	01/04/2004
C142-07	Inspection of Lifting equipment and Pressure Systems	BUREAU VERITAS	01/10/2007
C150-06	Leakage Repairs	Meridian Utilities LTD (Morrow, O'Connell, Mills JV)	03/12/2006
C155-05	Supply & Delivery of intrinsically safe personal gas monitoring equipment	Williams Industrial Services Ltd	01/04/2005

Tender No	Tender Title	Successful Suppliers	Date of Award
C160-04	Street Furniture Repairs	Morrow Group	01/04/2004
C160-07	Street Furniture Repairs	Morrow Contracts Ltd	17/09/2007
C166-05	Supply and Delivery of Spill Response Kits and Associated Spill Protection Equipment	Fentex Ltd	01/04/2004
C171-05	Sewer Maintenance - Clearing Blockages	Precision Industrial Services Ltd	01/07/2005
		McAllister Bros	
		Spectrum Premier Services	
		Paul Quigley & Son	
C179-05	Recruitment of Temporary staff	Select Recruitment NI Ltd	01/05/2005
		Kennedy Recruitment	
C182	Maintenance & Calibration of flow & pressure monitoring systems	Z TECH CONTROL SYSTEMS LTD	01/09/2005
C184-06	Collection, Transportation & Disposal of Special Waste	Irish Waste	01/04/2005
		Atlas Environmental	
		Wilson Waste Management	
C186-04	Supply of Renewable Energy to Northern Ireland Water	ESB Independent Energy (NI) Ltd	01/04/2004
C186-07	Supply of Renewable Energy to Northern Ireland Water	ESB Independent Energy NI Ltd	01/04/2006
C189	Coring of Road Reinstatements	AG Wilson	01/07/2006
		Morrows	
C191-06	Provision of Pest Control & Sewer Baiting	Belfast City Council	01/09/2006
		Ballymena Borough Council	
		Pestikill	
		Cannon Hygeine Ltd	
C201-05	Leakage detection equipment	Primayer Ltd	01/04/2005
		Palmer Environmental Ltd	
C202	Supply of Green Electricity to Water Service	Airtricity Energy Supply Ltd	01/04/2005
C203-07	Supply and Delivery of Leakage Data Logging Equipment	PRIMAYER LTD	12/11/2007

Tender No	Tender Title	Successful Suppliers	Date of Award
C216-06	Provision of Maintenance Support Services for Transmission/Mobile Radio Systems & Upgrade	Magdalene Ltd	01/04/2006
C222	Collection, Transportation and Disposal of Sewage Sludge Cake	Brookhall Estates	01/04/2004
		R Heatrick & Co	
		SMD Contracts	
C222-07	Collection, Transportation and Disposal of Sewage Sludge Cake	R Heatrick Ltd	08/05/2007
		Rural Generation Ltd	
C288	Development of Internet & Intranet Websites for NIWL	Being Communications Limited	
C234-04	Supply, delivery, installation & commissioning of access swipe card systems	Chubb (NI) Ltd	01/04/2004
C235-04	Supply, Delivery, Installation and Commissioning of Water Quality Monitoring Instruments	JDB Instrumentation	01/04/2004
		Isys Environmental	
		Park Electrical Services	
C240	Collection & Disposal of de watered sludge	IRISH WASTE SERVICES LTD	01/09/2005
		MC QUILLAN ENVIRO-CARE LTD	
C240-07	Collection, Transportation and Disposal of Water Treatment Works Sludge and Sludge Cake	Irish Waste Services	01/07/2005
		McQuillan Envirocare Ltd	
C241-05	Supply,Delivery, Installation and Repair of Submersible Pumps	FM Environmental	01/04/2005
		ITT Flygt Ltd	
		Robert Craig & Sons	
		Drilling & Pumping Supplies	

Tender No	Tender Title	Successful Suppliers	Date of Award
C241-08	Supply,Delivery, Installation and Repair of Submersible Pumps	BPF Distributors & Pumps Ltd	01/06/2009
		DRILLING & PUMPING SUPPLIES	
		Etec Services (UK) Ltd	
		FM ENVIRONMENTAL LTD	
		ITT FLYGT	
		Mono Pumps Ltd	
		RJ Smyth Engineering	
C269	Develop of a Corporate Logo for NIW	Weber Shandwick	01/09/2006
C250	Half hour Electricity Equipment	NIE Powerteam	01/08/2005
C251-05	Meter survey/ installation	KPL Group	08/07/2005
C254-05	Provision of a Financial Systems & Implementation Support Service	PriceWaterhouseCoopers LLP	03/06/2005
C255	High Voltage (HV) Equipment Maintenance	Eaton Electric Ltd	01/12/2005
C255-09	High Voltage (HV) Equipment Maintenance	Scotts Electrical Services	01/03/2010
C256	MV 90 Software	ITRON EMEA	19/12/2005
C258	Wastewater Sampling Equipment	ISYS	01/01/2006
C259-06	Collection & Desposal of Incinerator Ash	TRT Moore Sludge Clearance	12/04/2006
C259-07	Collection, Transportation and Disposal of Incinerator Ash	R HEATRICK LTD	04/12/2007
C262	Transformation training & development Strategy	BDO Stoy Hayward	01/04/2006
C264	Development of a Strategic development plan & Outline Business Case for Water Service Acc	Deloitte	
C265	Data Gap Analysis infrastructure assessment	Halcrow Management Sciences Ltd	01/02/2006
C267	Consultancy for Financial Advisers	PricewaterhouseCoopers	01/04/2006

Tender No	Tender Title	Successful Suppliers	Date of Award
C269	Development of a Corporate Identity for NI Water Ltd	Weber Shandwick Ltd	01/09/2006
C270-06	Supply, Delivery and Installation of a Sludge Logging System	JR PRIDHAM SERVICES LTD	01/01/2007
C272	SCADA Software Systems	WIZCON SYSTEMS	01/03/2006
C274	Consultancy for Shared Services & SSPU	Helm Corporation	10/04/2006
C276	Supply of Electricity to Water Service	Energia	27/10/2006
C277-07	Occupational Health Services	INDEPENDENT OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH LIMITED	01/04/2007
C279	Appointment of Consultant to Audit and Report on UBS Integrated Financial Model	Ernest & Young	08/09/2006
C280	Consultancy for Economic Regulation & Economic Regulatory Policy for NI Water	John W Smith	01/11/2006
C281-07	Meter Survey and Installation	ENTERPRISE MANAGED SERVICES LIMITED	06/02/2007
C282-06	Consultancy for Transformation Partnering	PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP	
C285-07	Internal Audit Services	Ernst & Young LLP	01/04/2007
C286-07	External Audit Services	KPMG CHARTERED ACCOUNTANTS	01/04/2007
C287	Provision of NI Water Reporter	Black & Veatch	03/10/2007
C287-09	Provision of NI Water Reporter	Halcrow Group Limited	08/10/2009
C289-06	Supply of online pH measurement systems at WTW's	PARK ELECTRICAL SERVICES	05/12/2008
C290	Provision of Advise & Guidance for the Procurement of ARMS	Peter J Graham Consultancy Ltd	
C293	Professional Resourcing Partner	PWC	01/02/2006
C293-08	Professional Resourcing Partner	GRAFTON RECRUITMENT	10/06/2008
C294-07	PEIT	SCOTTS ELECTRICAL SERVICES LIMITED	18/07/2007

Tender No	Tender Title	Successful Suppliers	Date of Award
C295	Rebranding & Refurbishment of Silent Valley	Parker Butler	
C296	Northern Ireland Water Vehicle Livery Rebrand	Resolutions Limited t/a Positive Solutions	
C297-07	WAMITAB Appointment of Assessors	PRACTICAL WASTE SOLUTIONS	01/05/2007
C298-07	Provision of a Central Claims Service & System	AON Risk Services	
C298-09	External Claims Handling	AON RISK SERVICES	01/07/2009
C300	Workwear for NIW	Haxton Safety Limited	24/09/2007
C300-07	Workware for NIW	Haxton Safety Limited	
C301	Appointment of consultancy advice on Health and Safety Policies, Procedures and Practices	Royal Society for Prevention of Accidents	
C302-07	ICT Service Delivery Partnership	NORTHGATE INFO SOLUTIONS	06/01/2009
C303-07	Provision of Insurance for NIW	AIG Europe (UK) Ltd	
C304-08	Disposal of NIW Surplus Vehicles Plant & Equipment	Wilsons Auctions Ltd	01/10/2008
C305-05	Provision of Company Pensions Actuarial Advice to Support a New Pension Scheme for WS	Mercer Human Resource Consulting Ltd	01/07/2005
C309-08	Service Repairs & Maintenance Project	MERIDIAN UTILITIES LTD	01/08/2008
C310	Provision of Econometric Analysis Training & Modelling Capability	Frontier Economics Ltd	
C312-08	Tax advisers	KPMG CHARTERED ACCOUNTANTS	01/02/2008
C313-08	Insurance Brokerage for NIW	AON RISK SERVICES	01/01/2008
C323-08	Supply of Consultative Support to Renewable Energy Project	Ove Arup & Partners	
C316-08	The provision & maintenance of Multifunctional products	NRG GROUP LTD	01/04/2008
C317-08	Provision of Autocad Licences	PENTAGON SOLUTIONS LTD	04/07/2008
C318	Mechanical Installation & repair	TES NI Ltd	01/11/2010

Tender No	Tender Title	Successful Suppliers	Date of Award
		FIN Engineering	
C319-08	Telemetry System Upgrade Project	SERCK CONTROLS LTD	14/10/2009
C321-08	Delivery for Unit Cost Database for NIW	CSSP	27/10/2008
C322-08	Real Time Enterprise System Project	MWH UK Ltd	02/11/2009
C324-08	Buoy Maintenance	Strangford Moorings	01/06/2009
C325-08	Supply,Delivery, Installation & Maintenance of Bufferless Chlorine Residual Monitors	Process Instruments Ltd	18/11/2008
C327-08	Automated Chemical analyser - Altnagelvin Wastewater	Labmedics Ltd	
C328-08	Framework for the Provision of Professional Consultancy Services	ALVAREZ & MARSAL EUROPE LIMITED	08/12/2008
		Anaeko Ltd	
		ASIDUA LIMITED	
		ASM HORWATH	
		BDO Stoy Hayward	
		BT PLC	
		Chegan Ltd	
		Cognizant Technology Solutions	
		DELOITTE MCS LIMITED	
		Ernst & Young LLP	
		Europe Economics	
		FPM Accountants LLP	
		Frontier Economics Ltd	
		FUJITSU SERVICES LTD	
		Grant Thornton UK LLP	
		GRONTMIJ LTD	
		HALCROW ECONOMICS & BUSINESS SOLUTIONS	
		Kainos Software Ltd	
		KPMG CHARTERED ACCOUNTANTS	
		London Economics Ltd	

Tender No	Tender Title	Successful Suppliers	Date of Award
		MOTT MACDONALD LTD	
		MWH UK Ltd	
		NEUEDA	
		OLLAVE LTD	
		OXERA CONSULTING LTD	
		PA Consulting Group	
		PRICEWATERHOUSE COOPERS LLP	
		Satyam Computer Services	
		TRIBALHELM CORPORATION LIMITED	
		TRINITY HORNE LIMITED	
		Whitewater Consulting Ltd	
C330-09	Diamond Design Project	Asidua Limited	
C331-08	Vulnerability Management	Steria Ltd	
C332-08	Supply of Electricity to NI Water	AIRTRICITY ENERGY SUPPLY LTD	01/10/2008
		ESB Independent Energy	
C333-08	Provision of Estates Professional Services	BTW SHIELLS	13/10/2008
C334-08	Trial for Auto-Coagulation at Water Treatment Works	Achromatic	30/11/2008
C335-08	Maintenance of Telecoms Network	MAGDALENE LTD	01/03/2009
C336-09	Fuel Card Services (OGC)	Arval UK Ltd	23/08/2009
C337-08	S&D of PPE, Work-wear, Janitorial Supplies and Tools	Arco Ltd	01/01/2010
C338-09	Mechanical Joints and Fittings, Plumbing Materials, Under Pressure Fittings	Associated Pipeline Products Limited	11/11/2009
C339-08	Concrete & Road Surfacing Supplies (Minor Works)	MP Coleman	11/11/2009
C340-08	Sludge Management Services Contract	T M Waste Ltd	17/08/2009
C341-09	Full Service Marketing Agency	AV Browne	01/07/2009
C343-08	Water Resource Management Plan 2010	ATKINS LIMITED	23/03/2009
C347-08	Provision of Web Services	Being Communications Limited	21/05/2009

Tender No	Tender Title	Successful Suppliers	Date of Award
C348-08	Provision of Temporary Workers & Temporary Engineering Technicians	PREMIERE PEOPLE	01/07/2009
C351	Analytical Services: Lot 3 Supply & Delivery of Laboratory Consumables	Analab ALS Limited	18/02/2010
		Davidson & Hardy	
		ISYS Environmental Ltd	
		Laboratory Supplies and Instruments	
		Premier Scientific Ltd	
C351-09	Analytical Services: Lot 1 - Water, Waste Water and Trade Effluent Quality Analysis	Northumbrian Water	01/07/2009
C351-09	Analytical Services: Lot 2 - Collection and Transportation Of Water Quality Samples	Serco Integrated Services	01/07/2009
C352-09	Supply & Installation of Combined Storm Overflow Remote Monitoring Equipment	Williams Industrial Services Ltd	20/04/2009
C353-09	Rationalisation of NIW Office Accommodation	Gardiner & Theobald	01/03/2009
C354-09	Corporate Management System	CLN Solutions Ltd	
C355-09	Leakage Management Software	Crowder Consulting	18/09/2009
C358-09	Viewing tool for GIS database	Innogistic	24/02/2010
C361-09	Lifting Chains and Davit Sockets Installation Programme	Heyn Engineering	01/09/2009
C363-09	Wizcon annual maintenance	Elutions Ltd	01/07/2009
C364-09	Scada Services Provision (Capital Works Programme)	NI Computing Ltd	23/03/2010
C365-09	CMS Phase 2(a) Corporate Design	PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP	21/09/2009
C366-09	Preparation of IPPC applications for NIW Wastewater Sludge Thickening Centres (Phase 2)	ENTEC UK LTD	21/09/2009

Tender No	Tender Title	Successful Suppliers	Date of Award
C367-09	MWM Operating Platform.	AMT-SYBEX Limited	03/07/2009
C368-09	Service & maintenance of UPS backup.	Ashdale Engineeringeee	03/07/2009
C369-09	Mobile simms for MVM tough books.	BT Telecommunications Plc (mobile)	03/07/2009
C370-09	Offsite co-location of servers.	BT Telecommunications Plc (NI)	03/07/2009
C371-09	Line rental into Customer Contact Centre 0845++ numbers.	Cable + Wireless	03/07/2009
C372-09	Service and maintenance of hardware.	Dell Computers	03/07/2009
C373-09	Customer Billing & Contacts.	Echo Managed Services	03/07/2009
C374-09	Software provider.	Egain Communications Limited	03/07/2009
C375-09	Software provider.	Envox International Ltd/ Fluency	03/07/2009
C376-09	Service and maintenance of hardware.	HP Dublin	03/07/2009
C377-09	Service and maintenance of hardware.	IBM (UK) Ltd	03/07/2009
C378-09	Kodak i620 scanner & maintenance.	ISC Networks	03/07/2009
C379-09	Escrow account for MWM Operating Platform.	NCC Escrow International Limited	03/07/2009
C380-09	Franker/Letter Opener/Bomb Scanner.	Neopost/Scanna	03/07/2009
C381-09	Mobile simms for MWM tough books.	Orange Personal Communications Services Limited	03/07/2009
C382-09	Toughbooks - Procurement & Warranty.	Panasonic	03/07/2009
C383-09	Telephone hardware & service/maintenance	Redstone	03/07/2009
C384-09	Supply & Delivery of Cryptosporidium sampling equipment	Techno-path Distribution Ltd	06/11/2009
C385-09	Executive Recruitment	Forde May Consulting	08/10/2009
C388-09	Provision of sewer baiting	BELFAST CITY COUNCIL	01/12/2009
C389-09	Security Guarding & Associated Services	Property Support Services Ltd	13/04/2010

Tender No	Tender Title	Successful Suppliers	Date of Award
C390-09	Financial Risk Assessment	Dun and Bradstreet	28/09/2009
C391	Supply of Natural Gas within NI Water Sites	Firmus Energy	01/04/2010
C393-09	Cost Reduction Plan for the NI Water Fleet	Motor Vehicle Consultants Ltd	04/11/2009
C396-09	PC10 Project Manager	Greenlight Consulting	01/11/2009
C397-09	Printing & Addressing of Interruption of Supply Cards - Quotation	Pierce Communications	15/12/2009
C400	Supply & Delivery of Twin Steer Tractor Unit	NI Trucks	22/12/2009
C401	Supply & Delivery of 30000 litre semi trailer Vacuum Tank	Crossland Tankers	22/12/2009
C403	Provision of External Audit	KPMG	01/04/2010
C405	Mobile Phones - OGC Framework	Vodafone	09/04/2010
C406	Procurement of FITA-MAX Express Elution System	Technopath Distribution	18/12/2009
C407	Supply of electricity at sites with unmetered supply points at sites within NI Water	NIE Energy Ltd	01/02/2010
C411	Apponitment of Energy Consultant	Dennis Brereton	16/09/2009
C416	Provision of Occupational Health	Independent Occupational Health Ltd	01/04/2010
C417	Provision of Confidential Counselling and Employee Welfare Services	Carecall	14/04/2010
C423	Desludging of Septic Tanks	Road Safety Contracts	05/07/2010
C424	Operation and Maintenance Support for Telemetry Scanning Radios	Magdelene Ltd	24/05/2010
C425	Business Improvement	Symology Ltd	23/02/2010
C428	Meter Installation & Associated Activities	Meridian Utilities	01/10/2010
C430	Removal of Scrap from NI Water Locations	Fleming Metal Recycling	13/05/2010
C442	Ellipse Enterprise Web Services	AMT Sybex Ltd	04/06/2010
C443	Catering at Antrim Training Centre	Fountain Bakery	01/09/2010

Tender No	Tender Title	Successful Suppliers	Date of Award
C445	LIMS - Software Licence and Hardware Support	ThermoFisher Scientific	01/04/2010
C446	Huber Proprietary Screens	Huber Technology	06/08/2010
C447	Supply of Electricity to NI Water	ESB	01/01/2010
C449	Maintenance of Water Turbines	NHT Engineering	01/09/2010
C450	Provision of Audio Briefing service	InTouch MCS Ltd	11/08/2010
T001	Supply & Delivery of Vans & Derivatives - NICS Wide	DONNELLY BROS GARAGES (DUNGANNON) LTD	01/01/2004
		LINDSAY CARS LTD	
		NI TRUCKS LTD	
		TBF Thompson	
T001-07	Supply & Delivery of Vans & Dual Purpose Vehicles	Charles Hurst	27/12/2007
		DONNELLY BROS GARAGES LTD	
		LINDSAY CARS LTD	
		NI TRUCKS LTD	
		TBF THOMPSON (GARVAGH) LTD	
T004	Repair & Maintenance Of Vehicles & Mobile Plant	NI Trucks Ltd	01/11/2004
T004-09	Repair & Maintenance Of Vehicles & Mobile Plant	TBF Thompson (Garvagh) Ltd	01/06/2009
T005-04	Bodywork for vehicles and mobile plant	NI Trucks Ltd	01/11/2004
		Irish Road Motors	
T005	Bodywork for vehicles and mobile plant	NI Trucks Ltd	01/11/2004
		Irish Road Motors	
T005-09	Bodywork for vehicles and mobile plant	Cahill Motor Engineering (NI) Ltd	01/06/2009
		TBF Thompson (Garvagh) Ltd	
T017-09	Spare Parts for Vans and Derivatives (Service Wide)	DONNELLY & TAGGART LTD	08/06/2009
		Fyfes Vehicle & Engineering Supplies	

Tender No	Tender Title	Successful Suppliers	Date of Award
		NI TRUCKS LTD	
		TBF THOMPSON (GARVAGH) LTD	
T020	Engineering Works and Vacuum Pressure Testing	CROSSLAND TANKERS LIMITED	03/06/2010

TABLE 2 CAPITAL CONTRACTS AWARDED SINCE 1 APRIL 2007

Project No	Project Name	Contractor	A3 Total £K	Approved Date
JS179	Ballykine Gravity Distribution	Lagan Construction Ltd	934	23/03/2010
KG086	Moyallen SPS Upgrade	Conwell Contracts Ltd	70	23/03/2010
JR407	Security improvements at Keypoint Installations	OConnell - Mills JV	164	23/03/2010
KS847	Comber Road WWPS Conversion	WIS/Gillen JV	183	23/03/2010
KL455	Londonderry DAP: Sewers Rehab Phase1	Purac Brand	2549	12/03/2010
KL428	Londonderry Sewer Imps Stage 2 - Duke St PS Group Schemes	Purac Brand	782	12/03/2010
KS342	Ballyloughlin Rd, Maghera SPS Rationalisation	Euro Services (NI)	105	12/03/2010
KR310	Newtownbreda WwTW	Biwater Graham JV	4878	12/03/2010
KT102	Dunmurry WwTW Modifications	Biwater Graham JV	4993	12/03/2010
KB269	Toome (Creagh) Sewerage Scheme	Shearwater Consortium	1690	01/03/2010
KA164	Parkgate WwTW Rationalization	Dawson WAM Ltd	707	01/03/2010
JL750	Ballinrees to Limavady/ Londonderry Supply Augmentation	OConnell - Mills JV	679	23/02/2010
KL445	Londonderry DAP: Victoria road Work Package	Purac Brand	507	23/02/2010
JR416	CTM Extension - Barnetts Park to Purdysburn	Lagan Construction Ltd	2693	23/02/2010
JB657	Garstings Hill SR, Ballymena, Water Pumping station.	Campbell Quinn JV Ltd	425	23/02/2010
KR440	Ballywalter DAP Stage 1	John Graham (Dromore) Ltd	325	22/02/2010

Project No	Project Name	Contractor	A3 Total £K	Approved Date
JR407	Security improvements at Keypoint Installations	VIS Security	486	18/02/2010
JC314	Fairview Lane, Articlave - Watermain Ext	OConnell - Mills JV	31	16/02/2010
JF583	Carland Service Reservoir	BWW Water NI Ltd	1935	15/02/2010
JL758	Reservoir Rehabilitation Programme Phase 3	BSG Civil Engineering Ltd	15	15/02/2010
JL758	Reservoir Rehabilitation Programme Phase 3	BSG Civil Engineering Ltd	106	15/02/2010
KS836	Crawfordsburn Road, Bangor Storm and Foul sewer Extensions	Farrans Construction Ltd	72	15/02/2010
JG035	Ballydougan to Newry Main Link Reinforcement	Campbell Quinn JV Ltd	838	11/02/2010
KN533	Rousky Sewerage Scheme	Quinns Automation Ltd	235	09/02/2010
KG145	Derrytrasna WwTW Upgrade	BSG Civil Engineering Ltd	478	09/02/2010
JR375	A55 Knock Road Belfast Widening	John Graham (Dromore) Ltd	13	09/02/2010
JL753	A2 (Maydown) Dualling - Watermain and Sewer Alterations	Lagan Construction Ltd	72	09/02/2010
KA220	Mill Brae, Larne , Storm Sewer Extension	Bradley and Co.	16	29/01/2010
KS372	Market Street SPS Upgrade, Downpatrick	BSG Civil Engineering Ltd	920	29/01/2010
KB436	Whitehead, Ballystruder & Ballycarry Rationalisation	BSG Civil Engineering Ltd	2928	27/01/2010
KN616	Derry Road, Strabane Storm Sewer	McCrossan Contracts LTD	170	21/01/2010
JV836	Moneydarragh Road, Annalong, Replacement Watermain	Farrans Construction Ltd	49	21/01/2010
KI462	PLC Robustness Project	Williams Industrial Services	400	21/01/2010
KP597	Enniskillen New Acute Hospital Foul PM Extension	Mills Contracts	205	21/01/2010
KL438	Greenhaw Rd Storm Sewer Extension, Londonderry	Conwell Contracts Ltd	212	21/01/2010

Project No	Project Name	Contractor	A3 Total £K	Approved Date
JL758	Reservoir Rehabilitation Programme Phase 3	BSG Civil Engineering Ltd	146	12/01/2010
JL758	Reservoir Rehabilitation Programme Phase 3	BSG Civil Engineering Ltd	21	12/01/2010
KV073	Windmill Road SPS Replacement Sewer	Euro Services (NI)	44	12/01/2010
JR151	West Belfast/ North Lisburn	BSG Civil Engineering Ltd	826	21/12/2009
JL758	Reservoir Rehabilitation Programme Phase 3	BSG Civil Engineering Ltd	0	21/12/2009
JL758	Reservoir Rehabilitation Programme Phase 3	BSG Civil Engineering Ltd	126	21/12/2009
JL758	Reservoir Rehabilitation Programme Phase 3	BSG Civil Engineering Ltd	0	21/12/2009
JL758	Reservoir Rehabilitation Programme Phase 3	Graham Structural Repairs	628	21/12/2009
KS832	Gransha Road, Bangor WWPS Refurbishment	John Graham (Dromore) Ltd	492	21/12/2009
KL456	Londonderry DAP: Sewers Rehab Phase2	Purac Brand	1096.48	17/12/2009
KL448	Londonderry DAP: Victoria road Work Package:CSO Rationalisation	Purac Brand	1061.5	17/12/2009
KR453	Ellis Street, Carrickfergus, Sewer replacement/ rehabilitation	John Graham (Dromore) Ltd	218	17/12/2009
KL443	Londonderry DAP: Duke Street Work package	Purac Brand	4065	10/12/2009
KL450	Londonderry DAP: Strathfoyle & Drumahoe Work package: Caw PS	Purac Brand	1097	09/12/2009
KC411	Quay Road, Ballycastle, Storm Sewer Extension	T. G. Eakin	11	09/12/2009
KC417	Mill Street , Ballycastle, Storm Sewer Outfall	Bradley and Co.	10	09/12/2009
KD102	Hospital Road Magherafelt	Bradley and Co.	46	09/12/2009
KT125	Hook's Corner WwTW	Biwater Graham JV	1380	04/12/2009
KT377	New Holland WwTW	Biwater Graham JV	1840	04/12/2009
KP351	Derrylin WwTW	Lowry Bros Ltd	8	03/12/2009
KS216	Dunmore Sewerage - EC Compliance	McNicholas Construction	202	03/12/2009

Project No	Project Name	Contractor	A3 Total £K	Approved Date
KV094	Whyte Acres, Banbridge SPS Upgrade	Quinns Automation Ltd	47	03/12/2009
KG104	Halls Mill, Laurencetown SPS Upgrade	Quinns Automation Ltd	70	03/12/2009
KV157	Rathfriland WWTW Inlet Screens and CSOs	Eimco Water Technologies (Ireland) Ltd	180	03/12/2009
JV831	Watermain Extension at Ballymageough Rd, Kilkeel	Farrans Construction Ltd	110.25	01/12/2009
KG179	Meadowbrook, Craigavon Foul and Storm Sewer Extension	Euro Services (NI)	24	01/12/2009
KC398	Hezlett Primary SPS Overflow, Castlerock	Bradley and Co.	57	01/12/2009
KV064	Lurganare WwTW	Quinns Automation Ltd	475	26/11/2009
KR391	Portavogie WwTW Interim Solution	Biwater Graham JV	1060	23/11/2009
KS843	Stella Maris, Strangford. Sewer Extension	Euro Services (NI)	15	23/11/2009
KB434	Portglenone DAP Phase 1	Dawson WAM Ltd	567	16/11/2009
JG036	Castor Bay to Dungannon Strategic Trunk Mains	BWW Water NI Ltd	15177	16/11/2009
KP351	Derrylin WwTW	Copa Ltd	13	16/11/2009
KA217	Ballylagan Road Straid, Storm and Foul Sewers	Bradley and Co.	57	11/11/2009
KG172	Wastewater treatment- Provision of maintenance related work at various locations	BSG Civil Engineering Ltd	105	03/11/2009
KG172	Wastewater treatment- Provision of maintenance related work at various locations	BSG Civil Engineering Ltd	395	29/10/2009
JL758	Reservoir Rehabilitation Programme Phase 3	BSG Civil Engineering Ltd	83	29/10/2009
KB282	Magherafelt WwTW	WIS/Gillen JV	7250	29/10/2009
KF320	Bush WwTWs	Deane Public Works	438	29/10/2009
JP654	Erneside Roundabout Road Improvements	John Graham (Dromore) Ltd	14	29/10/2009
JL758	Reservoir Rehabilitation Programme Phase 3	Graham Structural Repairs	182	23/10/2009

Project No	Project Name	Contractor	A3 Total £K	Approved Date
KR425	Dunmisk Park Belfast Storm Sewer	ONeill Contracts	72	23/10/2009
KG170	Derrymore Road Aghagallon Storm Sewer Extension	Glen Contracts	31	23/10/2009
KT113	Ravarnet WwTW	John Graham (Dromore) Ltd	597	21/10/2009
KN574	Ballybrack Road Foul Sewer Extension	W. J. McLaughlin	91	21/10/2009
JV835	O'Callaghan Road, Silverbridge, Replacement Watermain	Campbell Quinn JV Ltd	65	20/10/2009
KL449	Londonderry DAP: Strathfoyle & Drumahoe Work package: Drumahoe Old PS	Purac Brand	1239	19/10/2009
KR310	Newtownbreda WwTW	Biwater Graham JV	352	19/10/2009
KR255	Belfast Sewers Project	NIE Connect	1376	19/10/2009
KO173	Ballynakilly Sewage Pumping Station	W. J. McLaughlin	98	14/10/2009
KG051	Sewage PS Upgrades networks Area A	Conwell Contracts Ltd	309	14/10/2009
JB547	Reservoir Rehabilitation Northern Area Phase 1	EPSCO LTD	4	14/10/2009
JP651	Killyhevlin WTW replacement acid spillage tank	AECOM DB/Farrans JV	182	14/10/2009
KG168	Lyndale Manor Portadown Foul Sewer Extension	Quinns Automation Ltd	133	14/10/2009
KF325	Annaghugh Hill Loughgall, Storm Sewer Extension	Glen Contracts	55	14/10/2009
KV150	Forthill Road Newry Foul Sewer Extension	Engineering Services (Terence McGeary)	28	14/10/2009
JA269	Castle Road/Whitehill Road Randalstown WM Replacement	Campbell Quinn JV Ltd	442	14/10/2009
JB667	Woodtown Road, Ballymena, Watermain Replacement	OConnell - Mills JV	63	13/10/2009
KG176	Crowhill Road, Bleary, Craigavon. Foul Sewer Extension	Engineering Services (Terence McGeary)	38	13/10/2009

Project No	Project Name	Contractor	A3 Total £K	Approved Date
JB652	Frys Road, Ballymena New Watermain	Shaw Automation Company	69	13/10/2009
JL707	Watermain Replacement Western Area B	W. J. McLaughlin	7.7	13/10/2009
KR389	Ballyhalbert WwTW Interim Solution	Biwater Graham JV	3665	09/10/2009
KO093	Ballylough Road Castlewellan	Sean Murray	64	05/10/2009
KG068	Kiln Road SPS Upgrade [Lurgan]	Conwell Contracts Ltd	48	25/09/2009
KG103	Tullylish SPS Upgrade	Quinns Automation Ltd	14.8	25/09/2009
KB269	Toome (Creagh) Sewerage Scheme	Geda & Eimco Water Technologies Ltd	3705	25/09/2009
KA195	Mullaghboy WWTW	Biwater Graham JV	1087	25/09/2009
KF319	Annaghmore WwTWs	Purac Brand	1712	25/09/2009
KS347	Crossgar Road, Ballynahinch Storm Sewer	Rodgers Contracts Ltd	165	25/09/2009
KC406	Ballycreagh Road, Cloughmills Foul Sewer Extension	T. G. Eakin	14	25/09/2009
KD988	Foul Sewer Maghermenagh Gardens Portrush	J Kennedy & Co	122	25/09/2009
KC413	Glebe Road, Rasharkin - Sewage Scheme	T. G. Eakin	32.9	25/09/2009
JL758	Reservoir Rehabilitation Programme Phase 3	BSG Civil Engineering Ltd	72	25/09/2009
JL758	Reservoir Rehabilitation Programme Phase 3	BSG Civil Engineering Ltd	83	10/09/2009
JL758	Reservoir Rehabilitation Programme Phase 3	BSG Civil Engineering Ltd	66	10/09/2009
KC284	Cloughmills WwTW	Biwater Graham JV	810	10/09/2009
KB322	Martinstown WwTW	Biwater Graham JV	481	10/09/2009
KB333	Cargan WwTW	Biwater Graham JV	516	10/09/2009
KV091	Kiln Lane, Banbridge SPS Upgrade	Engineering Services (Terence McGeary)	33	10/09/2009
KL393	Ballymonie WwTW	Biwater Graham JV	598	10/09/2009
KS348	Shimna Rd, Newcastle, Sewer Replacement	BSG Civil Engineering Ltd	125	07/09/2009

Project No	Project Name	Contractor	A3 Total £K	Approved Date
KG175	Cornmarket Street, Tandragee Storm Sewer Extension	James Oliver Hearty & Son	36	03/09/2009
JL723	Carmony Water Treatment Works Upgrade	AECOM DB/Farrans JV	3465	02/09/2009
JN390	Lough Bradan WTWs Upgrade	AECOM DB/Farrans JV	4218	02/09/2009
KC232	North Coast WwTW EC Compliance	Boyd Landscapes Ltd	20	26/08/2009
JT128	Lisburn Town Zone Watermain Improvements	Enterprise/Farrans	1558	26/08/2009
KB428	Draperstown DAP	Dawson WAM Ltd	859	26/08/2009
KB445	Pomeroy Main Street Sewer Repl	Quinns Automation Ltd	73	26/08/2009
KA211	Old Glenarm Road, Larne, Foul Sewer Extension	Bradley and Co.	9	25/08/2009
KB442	Tobermore SPS Replacement	Dawson WAM Ltd	190	25/08/2009
KR452	Baroda Street / Ormeau Park, Belfast CSO	John Graham (Dromore) Ltd	671	25/08/2009
JS284	Portaferry, Ballyquinton area mains replacment.	McNicholas Construction	479	25/08/2009
KR401	East Belfast Phase 1	John Graham (Dromore) Ltd	427	25/08/2009
KG150	Moygannon Rd Donaghcloney Civil Contract	Glen Contracts	17	17/08/2009
JA238	Antrim Ring Main Relocation	Campbell Quinn JV Ltd	267	12/08/2009
JV067	Jerrettspass Chlorination	Siemens Water Technologies	15	12/08/2009
JA210	Tardree Zone WM Imps	Charles Brand - Holleran JV	3311	12/08/2009
JG022	Castor Bay/ Shanmoy Zone	Enterprise/Farrans	546	12/08/2009
JB669	Tullycall Road, Cookstown, Watermain Replacement.	Campbell Quinn JV Ltd	83	12/08/2009
JL758	Reservoir Rehabilitation Programme Phase 3	BSG Civil Engineering Ltd	105	12/08/2009
JA270	Bellahill, Ballycarry, Co Antrim, WM Replacement.	Farrans Construction Ltd	79	12/08/2009

Project No	Project Name	Contractor	A3 Total £K	Approved Date
KS831	Dermott Park, Comber Storm Sewer Upgrading	McNicholas Construction	59	12/08/2009
JB653	Loan Command SR, Inlet Watermain	Campbell Quinn JV Ltd	182	12/08/2009
JN495	Creggan Road Carrickmore Watermain Extension	Campbell Quinn JV Ltd	35	31/07/2009
KS820	Upper North St/Mark St, Newtownards Storm Sewer	ONeill Contracts	33	31/07/2009
KA210	Moyra Road, Brookfield, Doagh, Foul Sewer Extension	Bradley and Co.	25	31/07/2009
JR428	Belfast City Centre Zone WM Improvements	Enterprise/Farrans	3713	31/07/2009
KV151	Carrickdesland, Burren Foul Sewer Extension	Engineering Services (Terence McGeary)	126	31/07/2009
JR432	Whiteabbey Lower, Mains Replacement. Newtownabbey	McNicholas Construction	381	31/07/2009
JC384	Cushendall Road, Ballycastle, Watermain Extension	Campbell Quinn JV Ltd	18	31/07/2009
KA219	Belfast Road, Antrim , Storm Sewer Extension	Bradley and Co.	20	31/07/2009
JC293	Ballinrees Central Zone Watermain Improvements	Charles Brand - Holleran JV	1767	31/07/2009
KC231	Ballycastle Sewerage Scheme	Dawson WAM Ltd	389	31/07/2009
KD021	Knocktarna Manor, Coleraine Repl SPS	T. G. Eakin	41	31/07/2009
KS381	North Road, Newtownards Storm	ONeill Contracts	266	28/07/2009
KS371	Killinchy Street Comber Storm Sewer	ONeill Contracts	71	28/07/2009
JB653	Loan Command SR, Inlet Watermain	Shaw Automation Company	64	28/07/2009
KR421	Hillview Road Belfast Storm Sewer Extension	Farrans Construction Ltd	77	27/07/2009
JB665	Tullaghans SR, Dunloy, New Reservoir	Farrans Construction Ltd	739.5	23/07/2009
JC378	Glenlough SR, Ballymoney, New SR	Farrans Construction Ltd	1096.6	23/07/2009

Project No	Project Name	Contractor	A3 Total £K	Approved Date
JB648	Dungonnell Command Service Reservoir	Farrans Construction Ltd	1026.5	23/07/2009
KD141	Headland Avenue Storm relief sewer	T. G. Eakin	16	23/07/2009
KV092	Bannview Heights, Banbridge SPS Upgrade	Quinns Automation Ltd	19.3	21/07/2009
KL431	Limavady DAP stage 1	Dawson WAM Ltd	829	21/07/2009
KP590	Loaneden, Kesh SPS Upgrade and PN Extension	P. Clarke & Sons Ltd	95	21/07/2009
KT386	Lisburn Road, Culavey Road Hillsborough Storm Sewer	Rodgers Contracts Ltd	105	21/07/2009
KS827	Hamilton Road, Bangor Storm Sewer	McNicholas Construction	151	21/07/2009
JC381	Altnahinch WTP, Ballymoney, New CWB.	Farrans Construction Ltd	738.9	10/07/2009
KG167	Ripley Meadows Portadown Storm Sewer Upgrade	Quinns Automation Ltd	66	10/07/2009
KV158	Manse Road Banbridge Foul & Storm Sewer Extensions	Campbell Contracts Ltd	47	10/07/2009
JR432	Whiteabbey Lower, Mains Replacement. Newtownabbey	McNicholas Construction	460	10/07/2009
JR432	Whiteabbey Lower, Mains Replacement. Newtownabbey	Farrans Construction Ltd	408	10/07/2009
JS284	Portaferry, Ballyquinton area mains replacment.	McNicholas Construction	499	10/07/2009
JS284	Portaferry, Ballyquinton area mains replacment.	McNicholas Construction	158	10/07/2009
KN610	Drumlegagh Storm Sewer Extension	McFadden Ltd	129	10/07/2009
JB623	Northern Key Transport Corridor, Ballymena Watermain Scheme	IPL Group	6	10/07/2009
KR400	Lukes Point (Bangor) DAP Phase 1	John Graham (Dromore) Ltd	1538	03/07/2009
KR309	Belvoir Park Trunk Sewer	John Graham (Dromore) Ltd	1291	03/07/2009

Project No	Project Name	Contractor	A3 Total £K	Approved Date
KL459	Limavady DAP: Stage 2, Roe Mill Road Sewer Upgrades	Dawson WAM Ltd	483	26/06/2009
KB284	Coagh WwTW Improvements	Purac Brand	823	24/06/2009
KB278	Moneymore STW Imps	Purac Brand	1049	24/06/2009
KV157	Rathfriland WWTW Inlet Screens and CSOS	BSG Civil Engineering Ltd	218	23/06/2009
JS284	Portaferry, Ballyquinton area mains replacment.	Graham Structural Repairs	130	23/06/2009
JB656	Magherafelt Road, Tobermore, Watermain Extension	OConnell - Mills JV	24	19/06/2009
JR423	Thornberry Hill, Wolfhill Mains Extension, Ligoneil, Belfast	Farrans Construction Ltd	25	19/06/2009
JG073	Lurgan & Portadown Public Realm Associated Infrastructure Improvements	Farrans Construction Ltd	479	19/06/2009
JG073	Lurgan & Portadown Public Realm Associated Infrastructure Improvements	Farrans Construction Ltd	286	19/06/2009
KB429	Tamneylennan - Stewartstown SPS Upgrade	T. O Connell & Sons	93	19/06/2009
KG157	Maghaberry Flood Alleviation Projects	BSG Civil Engineering Ltd	724	19/06/2009
KC397	Castlerock Road Coleraine - Storm Sewer	Campbell Contracts Ltd	874	19/06/2009
KS377	Downs Road/Castle Park Sewer Upgrade/Attenuation	BSG Civil Engineering Ltd	37	17/06/2009
KS326	Commons Road, Ballykinlar Storm Sewer	McNicholas Construction	155	15/06/2009
KX220	Small WWTWs Priority Upgrades	BSG Civil Engineering Ltd	4830	15/06/2009
JL758	Reservoir Rehabilitation Programme Phase 3	BSG Civil Engineering Ltd	55	15/06/2009
KS828	Glen Road, Comber Flood Alleviation	Rodgers Contracts Ltd	100	09/06/2009

Project No	Project Name	Contractor	A3 Total £K	Approved Date
KR402	Joymount Carrick DAP Phase 1	John Graham (Dromore) Ltd	1095	09/06/2009
JB623	Northern Key Transport Corridor, Ballymena Watermain Scheme	Shaw Automation Company	71	03/06/2009
KS366	Upper Greenwall Street Storm Sewer Ext.	Rodgers Contracts Ltd	21	03/06/2009
KG084	Regency Manor Sewage Pumping Station	Conwell Contracts Ltd	173	03/06/2009
JT149	Lisburn to R.O.I. Border Trunk Road Improvements	Lagan Construction Ltd Ferrovial AG	456	03/06/2009
KS344	Oaklands, Darragh Cross SPS Upgrade	Engineering Services (Terence McGeary)	30	03/06/2009
JR427	Mains replacement ,Belfast Public Realm Phase 1 Area 2	Farrans Construction Ltd	94.5	03/06/2009
KR411	Antrim Road, Mallusk Foul and Storm Sewer Extension	McNicholas Construction	48	03/06/2009
JL758	Reservoir Rehabilitation Programme Phase 3	BSG Civil Engineering Ltd	38	03/06/2009
JL758	Reservoir Rehabilitation Programme Phase 3	Graham Structural Repairs	82	03/06/2009
KL300	Dungiven WwTW	Eimco Water Technologies (Ireland) Ltd	132	27/05/2009
JL697	Waterside Zone Watermain Improvements	Charles Brand - Holleran JV	1228	18/05/2009
JL698	Carmoney East Zone Watermain Improvements	Charles Brand - Holleran JV	2120	18/05/2009
JS223	Ballygowan Zone Watermain Improvements	Enterprise/Farrans	4130	18/05/2009
JS225	Mid Down Zone WM Imps	Enterprise/Farrans	4113	18/05/2009
KT374	Scroggy Road Glenavy	Quinns Automation Ltd	104	18/05/2009
JV820	Carron Hill Supply Zone Management Plan	Campbell Quinn JV Ltd	25	18/05/2009
KV152	Abbey Grammar School Storm Sewer Extension	Quinns Automation Ltd	154	18/05/2009
JR429	First Time Services Visteon Site.Finaghy Road North,Belfast	Farrans Construction Ltd	43	14/05/2009

Project No	Project Name	Contractor	A3 Total £K	Approved Date
KR450	Fountainville Ave, Belfast, Swer Collapsed.	John Graham (Dromore) Ltd	37	14/05/2009
JL758	Reservoir Rehabilitation Programme Phase 3	BSG Civil Engineering Ltd	74	14/05/2009
JL758	Reservoir Rehabilitation Programme Phase 3	Graham Structural Repairs	215	14/05/2009
JL758	Reservoir Rehabilitation Programme Phase 3	Graham Structural Repairs	93	14/05/2009
KG156	Crumlin Road Lower Ballinderry Storm and Foul Sewer Extensions	Quinns Automation Ltd	162	14/05/2009
KB430	Derrynoyd Road Draperstown Foul & Storm Sewer Extension	Bradley and Co.	23	14/05/2009
JR400	A2 Shore Road Re- alignment – Greenisland	John Graham (Dromore) Ltd	96	14/05/2009
JC350	Ballycastle Zone Wm Improvements	Charles Brand - Holleran JV	3035	14/05/2009
KB279	Stewartstown WwTW Improvements	Biwater Graham JV	661	13/05/2009
KB281	Maghera WwTW	BSG Civil Engineering Ltd	1219	13/05/2009
KL363	Feeny WwTW	Biwater Graham JV	425	13/05/2009
KL300	Dungiven WwTW	BSG Civil Engineering Ltd	2175	13/05/2009
KB425	Caherty Road, Broughshane	T. O Connell & Sons	186	11/05/2009
KS328	Delinvilla Lane Dundrum Storm Sewer	P. F. Murphy	178	08/05/2009
KR402	Joymount Carrick DAP Phase 1	John Graham (Dromore) Ltd	982	22/04/2009
JN488	Aghyaran Road Booster Station	OConnell - Mills JV	33	22/04/2009
JF569	Ballygawley/CabraghSR Link Main	Not Allocated	8	22/04/2009
JL758	Reservoir Rehabilitation Programme Phase 3	BSG Civil Engineering Ltd	100	22/04/2009
KT385	Dundrod Drive Lisburn Storm Sewer Upgrade	ONeill Contracts	39	22/04/2009
KA207	Exchange Avenue, Doagh, Storm Sewer Extension	Bradley and Co.	40	22/04/2009

Project No	Project Name	Contractor	A3 Total £K	Approved Date
JB659	Old Portglenone Road, Portglenone, Watermain Trunk	OConnell - Mills JV	288	03/04/2009
KR361	Carrowreagh Road Dundonald Storm Sewer	Farrans Construction Ltd	424	03/04/2009
JT149	Lisburn to R.O.I. Border Trunk Road Improvements	Lagan Construction Ltd Ferrovia AG	402.15	30/03/2009
JT149	Lisburn to R.O.I. Border Trunk Road Improvements	Lagan Construction Ltd Ferrovia AG	475.28	30/03/2009
KL345	Donnybrewer WwTW	Purac Brand	1390	30/03/2009
KL345	Donnybrewer WwTW	Dawson WAM Ltd	1390	30/03/2009
KF012	Moygashel WwTW	Dawson WAM Ltd	3400	30/03/2009
KL457	Londonderry DAP: Storm Screening	Purac Brand	422	30/03/2009
JL758	Reservoir Rehabilitation Programme Phase 3	Maker Freyssinet	493	30/03/2009
JL758	Reservoir Rehabilitation Programme Phase 3	Graham Structural Repairs	75	27/03/2009
KT387	Trinity Terrace Lisburn Foul & Storm Sewer Extensions	Rodgers Contracts Ltd	21	27/03/2009
JA265	Enkalon Industrial Park, Randalstown Road, Antrim, Watermain Extension	Campbell Quinn JV Ltd	34	27/03/2009
KR424	Green Walk Newtownabbey Storm Sewer Extension	Rodgers Contracts Ltd	14	27/03/2009
KR420	Inglewood Park, Bangor Storm Sewer	Farrans Construction Ltd	28	27/03/2009
KR410	629 Upper Newtownards Road, Belfast Storm Sewer Extension		22	27/03/2009
KR323	Ligoniel Sewerage Scheme	Lagan Homes	61	27/03/2009
JT149	Lisburn to R.O.I. Border Trunk Road Improvements	Lagan Construction Ltd Ferrovia AG	483.6	27/03/2009
JT149	Lisburn to R.O.I. Border Trunk Road Improvements	Lagan Construction Ltd Ferrovia AG	479.44	27/03/2009
JT149	Lisburn to R.O.I. Border Trunk Road Improvements	Lagan Construction Ltd Ferrovia AG	429.45	27/03/2009

Project No	Project Name	Contractor	A3 Total £K	Approved Date
KA196	Glenarm Sewage Pumping Station	Bradley and Co.	283	27/03/2009
KT123	Edenderry WwTW	Biwater Graham JV	280	25/03/2009
KD041	Moyle Rd Ballycastle	T. G. Eakin	66	11/03/2009
JN482	Killymore Road, Gortin Pumping Station	Campbell Quinn JV Ltd	84	11/03/2009
KR413	Grahamsbridge Road, Dundonald, Belfast Storm Sewer Extension.	ONeill Contracts	48	11/03/2009
JL754	Derry City Centre Public Realm Replacement Watermains	McNicholas Construction	457	11/03/2009
JL758	Reservoir Rehabilitation Programme Phase 3	Graham Structural Repairs	105	10/03/2009
JC383	Drumcroon Road, Coleraine, Replacement Watermain	Campbell Quinn JV Ltd	57	10/03/2009
JB638	Kildowney Hill, Glarryford, Replacement Watermain	Campbell Quinn JV Ltd	65.1	10/03/2009
KC389	Mountsandel Road, Coleraine - Sewer Upgrade	T. G. Eakin	27	10/03/2009
KS817	Saintfield Waste Water Pumping Station, Pumping Main Replacement.	Rodgers Contracts Ltd	128	09/03/2009
KC409	Drumavoley Park, Ballycastle Foul Sewer.	Bradley and Co.	21	06/03/2009
KB409	Lissan Road Cookstown Replacement Storm Sewer	T. G. Eakin	296	06/03/2009
KF087	Laurelvale Main Street Sewage Replacements	Quinns Automation Ltd	10	06/03/2009
KV116	Abbey Park Kilkeel Sewer Replacement	BSG Civil Engineering Ltd	30	06/03/2009
KC337	Moneygran Road Kilrea Foul and Storm Sewers	Bradley and Co.	128	06/03/2009
KA151	Roughfort WwTW	Dawson WAM Ltd	204	02/03/2009
KR203	Kensington Gardens Flood Relief	John Graham (Dromore) Ltd	618	02/03/2009
KG121	Upper Edward Street Newry	Euro Services (NI)	104	02/03/2009
KC349	Church Road Rasharkin Storm Sewer Extension	Dawson WAM Ltd	210	02/03/2009

Project No	Project Name	Contractor	A3 Total £K	Approved Date
JG062	Lisnisky Lane/Portadown Road, Portadown	Lilburn Contracts	22	02/03/2009
JR424	Betterment and Deferment of Renewal for Mains Diversion at QUB Playing Fields	Queens University of Belfast	49.35	02/03/2009
KV155	Rostrevor Sewers Upgrading - Horners Lane Improvements	BSG Civil Engineering Ltd	37	02/03/2009
JB664	Munie Road/Straidkilly Road, Glenarm, Watermain Replacement	Campbell Quinn JV Ltd	131	17/02/2009
KB437	Whitewater Bridge Straw Foul Sewer Extension	Bradley and Co.	34	17/02/2009
JB652	Frys Road, Ballymena New Watermain	OConnell - Mills JV	336	17/02/2009
JB653	Loan Command SR, Inlet Watermain	OConnell - Mills JV	420	17/02/2009
KC288	Ballybogey WWTW	WIS/Gillen JV	621	17/02/2009
KN157	Cranagh WwTW	McFadden Ltd	331	17/02/2009
KC299	Bushmills + Portballintrae WwTW	GEDA Construction Co LTD	7005	17/02/2009
KG082	Foxgrove/Roughal Lane SPS Upgrade	W. J. McLaughlin	79	17/02/2009
KG083	Churchill Park SPS upgrade	Engineering Services (Terence McGeary)	196	11/02/2009
KB387	Church Street, Cookstown	T. O Connell & Sons	60	11/02/2009
JC336	Altnahinch and Seagahan WTW's Residual Sludge Disposal	AECOM DB/Farrans JV	4054	11/02/2009
KB425	Caherty Road, Broughshane	T. O Connell & Sons	63	11/02/2009
KC405	McClelland Park Dunloy Flood Alleviation DG5	Bradley and Co.	54	11/02/2009
JR414	Reservoir Rehabilitation South East Area Phase 2	BSG Civil Engineering Ltd	35	10/02/2009
JC370	Windyhill Road/Ballystrone Road, Coleraine, Watermain Extension	OConnell - Mills JV	36	10/02/2009
KC351	Station Road Dervock Foul Sewer	Bradley and Co.	52	03/02/2009

Project No	Project Name	Contractor	A3 Total £K	Approved Date
KR403	Whitehouse DAP Phase 1	John Graham (Dromore) Ltd	756	02/02/2009
JV828	Shot Lane / Fedney Hill Road Banbridge Watermains Upgrade	Farrans Construction Ltd	24	26/01/2009
KB444	Burn Road Cookstown Storm Sewer Extension	T. O Connell & Sons	129	26/01/2009
JG036	Castor Bay to Dungannon Strategic Trunk Mains	Campbell Quinn JV Ltd	410	26/01/2009
KV074	Cambrook SPS to Green Road	Euro Services (NI)	278	26/01/2009
KF005	Coalisland WwTW	WIS/Gillen JV	7730.9	26/01/2009
KD039	Victoria Rd, Ballyclare	Bradley and Co.	30.45	26/01/2009
KL439	Cregg SPS, Claudy Emergency Overflow	Quinns Automation Ltd	27	16/01/2009
JC382	Ballynarry Road, Derrykeighan, Watermain Extension	OConnell - Mills JV	21	13/01/2009
JR414	Reservoir Rehabilitation South East Area Phase 2	BSG Civil Engineering Ltd	44	08/01/2009
KB321	Knockloughrim WwTW Outfall	T. O Connell & Sons	112	08/01/2009
JL699	Limavady Zone Watermain Improvements	Charles Brand - Holleran JV	1576	08/01/2009
JC349	Portballintrae Zone Wm Improvements	Charles Brand - Holleran JV	2243	08/01/2009
JB645	Tullygarley Road, Ballymena, Watermain Scheme	Campbell Quinn JV Ltd	30	02/01/2009
JC374	Gortahar Road, Rasharkin Watermain Extension	OConnell - Mills JV	23	02/01/2009
JC373	Lisboy Road Dunloy Watermain Extension	OConnell - Mills JV	13	02/01/2009
JB654	Aughnahoy Road, Portglenone Watermain Extension	OConnell - Mills JV	9.9	02/01/2009
JR414	Reservoir Rehabilitation South East Area Phase 2	Graham Structural Repairs	137	23/12/2008
JR414	Reservoir Rehabilitation South East Area Phase 2	Graham Structural Repairs	35	23/12/2008

Project No	Project Name	Contractor	A3 Total £K	Approved Date
JB655	Mullaghboy Road, Bellaghy, Watermain Replacement	OConnell - Mills JV	103	23/12/2008
JB636	Old Ballymoney Road, Ballymena, Replacement Watermain	OConnell - Mills JV	24	23/12/2008
KL423	Crevagh Park SPS Abandonment	Conwell Contracts Ltd	65	23/12/2008
JG022	Castor Bay/ Shanmoy Zone	Enterprise/Farrans	1596	23/12/2008
JL693	Cityside Zone Watermain Improvements	McNicholas Construction	310	23/12/2008
KV146	Dunaval SPS Storm Tanks	BSG Civil Engineering Ltd	77	17/12/2008
JS279	Ballygowan Road, Ballygowan, Watermain Replacement	Farrans Construction Ltd	210	17/12/2008
KL452	Campsie SPS Emergency O/F Redirection.	McFadden Ltd	15	17/12/2008
KC315	Ballymoney/Coleraine Sewers	Bradley and Co.	29	01/12/2008
KC327	Bridge Road, Dunloy	T. O Connell & Sons	57	01/12/2008
KC231	Ballycastle Sewerage Scheme	Dawson WAM Ltd	273.92	27/11/2008
KC393	Mounthamilton Road, Cloughmills - Foul Sewer Extension	T. G. Eakin	6	27/11/2008
KB422	Killyfaddy Road Magherafelt Sewerage Scheme	Bradley and Co.	130	27/11/2008
KB440	Broughshane Road, Ballymena, Foul Sewer Extension	Bradley and Co.	16	27/11/2008
KB439	Kilmascally Road, Ardboe, Storm Sewer	Bradley and Co.	37	27/11/2008
KP591	New foul sewer for H/D at Caledon Rd, Aughnacloy	Euro Services (NI)	50	26/11/2008
JL747	Repair of GAC Filters at Carmoney WTW	AECOM DB/Farrans JV	530	26/11/2008
KS273	Comber Rd/Portaferry Rd Newtownards SPS	John Graham (Dromore) Ltd	2093	26/11/2008
KS206	Seahill WwTW	Biwater Graham JV	277	26/11/2008

Project No	Project Name	Contractor	A3 Total £K	Approved Date
KS206	Seahill WwTW	Fostech Ltd	17	26/11/2008
KN556	Mountfield WwTW	McFadden Ltd	371	26/11/2008
KV070	Springfield Road Warrenpoint SPS Replacement	Euro Services (NI)	90	26/11/2008
KV067	Harmony Heights, Newry Foul Sewer Extension	Euro Services (NI)	136	21/11/2008
JB623	Northern Key Transport Corridor, Ballymena Watermain Scheme	Campbell Quinn JV Ltd	1234	21/11/2008
KN612	Strathroy, Omagh Storm Sewer	W. J. McLaughlin	145	21/11/2008
KL421	Gortinure Road, Gortinwood, Storm and Foul Sewer Extension	McCrossan Contracts LTD	188	21/11/2008
JR414	Reservoir Rehabilitation South East Area Phase 2	Maker Freyssinet	278	20/11/2008
KR385	Ormeau Road Storm Separation	John Graham (Dromore) Ltd	1116	12/11/2008
KV145	Charlotte Street/Newry Road Warrenpoint Proposed Sewer Improvements	Engineering Services (Terence McGeary)	749	06/11/2008
KG112	Dunkirk Road to Main Street Waringstown SS	Quinns Automation Ltd	197	06/11/2008
KD705	Main Street Storm Sewer, Coagh	Bradley and Co.	13	03/11/2008
KA143	Aldergrove Sewerage Scheme	Dawson WAM Ltd	2091	03/11/2008
KC394	Mounthamilton S.P.S., Cloughmills Replacement	T. G. Eakin	68	03/11/2008
JA254	Birchill Road Antrim Watermain	Campbell Quinn JV Ltd	284	30/10/2008
KF315	Bracken Court Coalisland Storm Sewer Extension	Glen Contracts	61	30/10/2008
KS310	Clough WwTW	BSG Civil Engineering Ltd	3175	30/10/2008
KG118	Crumlin Road Storm Sewer Extension	Quinns Automation Ltd	89	22/10/2008
KB400	Mullanahoe Road Ardboe Foul Sewer	T. G. Eakin	69	20/10/2008

Project No	Project Name	Contractor	A3 Total £K	Approved Date
KC353	Knock Road Ballymoney Foul & Storm Sewer Extension	T. G. Eakin	22	20/10/2008
JB624	Ballymacombs Road	Not Allocated	28	20/10/2008
KA161	Creevery Sewerage Scheme Phase II	Dawson WAM Ltd	935	20/10/2008
KC328	Castlecatt Road, Dervock	Bradley and Co.	60	20/10/2008
KG078	Dromore Rd, Lurgan, Sewer Extension	Glen Contracts	21	20/10/2008
KD090	Killygonlan/Mullanahoe Foul Sewer Replacement	GF Loughran	121	17/10/2008
KR375	216-228 Belmont Road, Belfast Sewer Rehabilitation	Rodgers Contracts Ltd	26.4	17/10/2008
JA263	Aghnadarragh Road, Glenavy Watermain Extension	Campbell Quinn JV Ltd	17	17/10/2008
JB660	Lough Fea Road, Cookstown, Watermain Replacement.	Campbell Quinn JV Ltd	65	17/10/2008
JR414	Reservoir Rehabilitation South East Area Phase 2	Maker Freyssinet	202	17/10/2008
JR414	Reservoir Rehabilitation South East Area Phase 2	BSG Civil Engineering Ltd	153	17/10/2008
JR414	Reservoir Rehabilitation South East Area Phase 2	BSG Civil Engineering Ltd	155	17/10/2008
KR404	Dunmurray DAP Phase 1	John Graham (Dromore) Ltd	651	14/10/2008
KR399	Ballyholme (Bangor) DAP Phase 1	John Graham (Dromore) Ltd	2696	14/10/2008
KV063	Newry Sewerage Networks Improvements	Euro Services (NI)	424	14/10/2008
JL752	Reservoir Rehabilitation Western Area Phase 2	Graham Structural Repairs	397	07/10/2008
JN489	Camowen River/ Killyclogher Road Watermain Replacement	Farrans Construction Ltd	211	24/09/2008
KS369	Ballylough Road/ Aghlisnafin Road Castlewellan	Engineering Services (Terence McGeary)	85	22/09/2008
KG153	Gilford Road Portadown Sewerage Upgrades	BSG Civil Engineering Ltd	2403	18/09/2008

Project No	Project Name	Contractor	A3 Total £K	Approved Date
KS378	Burren River SPS Upgrades & Networks Improvements	BSG Civil Engineering Ltd	790	17/09/2008
JR401	Lower Chichester Street, Belfast Watermains Replacement, Belfast Public Realm		110	15/09/2008
JA260	Clonkeen, Randalstown, Replacement Watermain	Campbell Quinn JV Ltd	300	15/09/2008
KG069	Stranmore Road Gilford Sewerage Scheme	BSG Civil Engineering Ltd	285.69	15/09/2008
KV149	Newry WWTW Aeration upgrade	BSG Civil Engineering Ltd	423.2	15/09/2008
JP656	Croaghirm Rd, Enniskillen Rep Watermain	Campbell Quinn JV Ltd	137	10/09/2008
KG063	Heron Wood and & Jubilee Heights, Dromore SPSs	Engineering Services (Terence McGeary)	206	10/09/2008
KR418	Castle Place / High Street Sewer and Water main Upgrade	Dawson WAM Ltd	1169	05/09/2008
JR414	Reservoir Rehabilitation South East Area Phase 2	Maker Freyssinet	294	05/09/2008
KC407	Middlepark Road, Cushendall, Relief Sewer	T. G. Eakin	73	04/09/2008
JC375	Carnamoney Lane, Draperstown, Watermain Extension	Campbell Quinn JV Ltd	16	04/09/2008
JS278	Saintfield Road, Ballygowan, Replacement Watermain	Farrans Construction Ltd	108	04/09/2008
KB397	Old Portglenone Road Ahoghill, Foul Sewer Extension	T. G. Eakin	12	04/09/2008
KT134	Lower Ballinderry WWTW	BSG Civil Engineering Ltd	1568	03/09/2008
JB647	Reservoir Rehabilitation Northern Area - Phase 2	Graham Structural Repairs	430	27/08/2008
KD972	The Aird Bushmills	Bradley and Co.	4	27/08/2008
KG101	Martins Yard and Gilford Mill SPS Rationalisation	BSG Civil Engineering Ltd	493.27	22/08/2008
JL752	Reservoir Rehabilitation Western Area Phase 2	Graham Structural Repairs	173	19/08/2008

Project No	Project Name	Contractor	A3 Total £K	Approved Date
JS280	Ballycreelly Road, Ballygowan, Wmain Rep	Farrans Construction Ltd	133.35	18/08/2008
JS281	Fields at Ballycreelly Road, Ballygowan, Wmain Rep	Farrans Construction Ltd	61.95	18/08/2008
KV122	High Street, Gilford Sewer Replacement	Conwell Contracts Ltd	118	18/08/2008
JC376	Tullysaran Road Watermain Extension	Campbell Quinn JV Ltd	29	18/08/2008
KS386	Longisland Drive SPS Rising Main (Kircubbin)	Rodgers Contracts Ltd	25	18/08/2008
KL435	Killary Road Drainage Improvements	Campbell Contracts Ltd	33	18/08/2008
JS268	Newtownards Southern Relief Road	McNicholas Construction	39.9	18/08/2008
JT149	Lisburn to R.O.I. Border Trunk Road Improvements	McNicholas Construction	79	18/08/2008
KA191	Black Cave & Upper Roddens Sewage Imps, Larne	Bradley and Co.	41	18/08/2008
JS222	Newtownards Town Zone Watermain Improvements	McNicholas Construction	2019.15	18/08/2008
JN355	North Tyrone Zone Watermain Improvements	Charles Brand - Holleran JV	2857	18/08/2008
KD041	Moyle Rd Ballycastle	Bradley and Co.	123	15/08/2008
KA168	Milltown Road Antrim	T. G. Eakin	41.73	15/08/2008
KR396	Kylemore Park, Belfast Flood Alleviation	ONeill Contracts	109.14	15/08/2008
KL437	Queens Quay combined sewer diversion Londonderry	Campbell Contracts Ltd	14	15/08/2008
KF033	Castlecaulfield WwTW	Purac Brand	3282	04/08/2008
KV093	Millstone Close, Moneyslane SPS Upgrade	Quinns Automation Ltd	163	01/08/2008
KS816	Magheraknock Road, Ballynahinch Sewer Replacement	Farrans Construction Ltd	27	01/08/2008
KG163	Obins Street Portadown Storm Sewer Extension	Glen Contracts	85	22/07/2008
JR414	Reservoir Rehabilitation South East Area Phase 2	BSG Civil Engineering Ltd	192	22/07/2008

Project No	Project Name	Contractor	A3 Total £K	Approved Date
KV012	Crossmaglen WwTW	BSG Civil Engineering Ltd	1845	09/07/2008
KC396	Mussenden Road, Articlave, Storm Sewer Extension	Campbell Contracts Ltd	28	07/07/2008
KP588	ST Patricks Terrace, Lisnaskea Flood Alleviation Scheme	P. Clarke & Sons Ltd	75	07/07/2008
KV113	Skerriff Road Cullyhanna Foul Sewer Extension	Euro Services (NI)	18	07/07/2008
KF313	Lisanally Special School, Armagh Foul Sewer Replacement	Euro Services (NI)	130	07/07/2008
KG146	Cloncarrish Road Birches Storm Sewer Extension	Glen Contracts	80	07/07/2008
JR414	Reservoir Rehabilitation South East Area Phase 2	BSG Civil Engineering Ltd	158	07/07/2008
KT384	Mandeville Avenue, Lisburn Foul Sewer Extension	Rodgers Contracts Ltd	11	07/07/2008
JB651	Carnlough Road, Broughshane, Watermain Replacement	Campbell Quinn JV Ltd	231	07/07/2008
JB650	Drummuck Road Maghera Watermain Extension	Campbell Quinn JV Ltd	13	07/07/2008
KA206	Small WwTWs Priority Upgrades	BSG Civil Engineering Ltd	5217	01/07/2008
KL429	Assessment of Flow Monitoring in WWTWs (UWWTD)	WIS/Gillen JV	215.05	01/07/2008
KR377	Glendarragh SPS - Replacement pumping main	McNicholas Construction	38	01/07/2008
KF312	Ashley Gardens Armagh foul sewer replacement	Conwell Contracts Ltd	123	24/06/2008
JB647	Reservoir Rehabilitation Northern Area - Phase 2	BSG Civil Engineering Ltd	35	24/06/2008
JB647	Reservoir Rehabilitation Northern Area - Phase 2	BSG Civil Engineering Ltd	336	24/06/2008
JN484	Glenhordial WTW replacement of Camowen pumping main	OConnell - Mills JV	359	24/06/2008
JR414	Reservoir Rehabilitation South East Area Phase 2	Maker Freyssinet	205	24/06/2008

Project No	Project Name	Contractor	A3 Total £K	Approved Date
KB411	Milburn Storm Sewer	T. G. Eakin	14	23/06/2008
KC308	Mussenden Rd Articlave	Bradley and Co.	81	23/06/2008
JA261	Old Ballybracken Road Barnish Road Kells Replacement Watermain	OConnell - Mills JV	259	16/06/2008
KL427	Ballykelly Main St, Replacement Sewer	Mills Contracts	435	16/06/2008
JN480	Dunnamona Road, Omagh. Replacement Watermain.	OConnell - Mills JV	202	16/06/2008
JN481	Cornavarrow, Omagh. Replacement Watermain	OConnell - Mills JV	159	16/06/2008
KG134	Carrick Drive, Banbridge Road Lurgan Storm Sewer Ext	Quinns Automation Ltd	27	16/06/2008
KS811	Portaferry DAP Phase 1	BSG Civil Engineering Ltd	649	12/06/2008
JB647	Reservoir Rehabilitation Northern Area - Phase 2	BSG Civil Engineering Ltd	50	11/06/2008
KO170	Lough Road, Lurgan	Engineering Services (Terence McGeary)	253	09/06/2008
KB362	Chapel Street, Cookstown	T. O Connell & Sons	370	06/06/2008
KC324	Anticur Rd/Carrowadoon Road, Dunloy Sewerage Scheme	Bradley and Co.	91	05/06/2008
KB431	The Brambles, Magherafelt - SPS Replacement	T. G. Eakin	152	05/06/2008
KS804	Millisle DAP - Phase 1	John Graham (Dromore) Ltd	178.2	05/06/2008
KS224	Downpatrick WwTW	Biwater Graham JV	9330	30/05/2008
KS354	Bangor Academy Sewers, Castle Street	Rodgers Contracts Ltd	97	28/05/2008
JB583	Oak Park, Draperstown Repl. Wm.	OConnell - Mills JV	38.5	28/05/2008
KG057	Kiln Road, Lurgan Foul Sewer Extension	Conwell Contracts Ltd	77	28/05/2008
JF563	Seagahan WTW	AECOM DB/Farrans JV	7215	28/05/2008
JB647	Reservoir Rehabilitation Northern Area - Phase 2	BSG Civil Engineering Ltd	133	28/05/2008
JN493	Georgian Villas, Omagh Repl Watermain	Farrans Construction Ltd	441	28/05/2008

Project No	Project Name	Contractor	A3 Total £K	Approved Date
JN494	Rodgers Road, Tattykeel Watermain Extension	OConnell - Mills JV	30	28/05/2008
JL752	Reservoir Rehabilitation Western Area Phase 2	Maker Freyssinet	137	28/05/2008
JC372	Newbridge Road, Ballymoney, Watermain Extension	OConnell - Mills JV	51	15/05/2008
KB412	Cookstown Road Moneymore Foul Sewer Extension	T. G. Eakin	26	15/05/2008
KR386	St Meryl Park / Kennedy Way Sewer Upgrade	John Graham (Dromore) Ltd	276	15/05/2008
JB647	Reservoir Rehabilitation Northern Area - Phase 2	BSG Civil Engineering Ltd	61	15/05/2008
JB647	Reservoir Rehabilitation Northern Area - Phase 2	BSG Civil Engineering Ltd	93	15/05/2008
JF579	Dungannon to Ballygawley (A4) Dualling Watermain Divisions	Campbell Quinn JV Ltd	183	15/05/2008
KL430	Gortnahey Road, Gortnahey, Dungiven Foul Sewer Ext	W. J. McLaughlin	13	15/05/2008
JL747	Repair of GAC Filters at Carmoney WTW	AECOM DB/Farrans JV	498	01/05/2008
KL419	Londonderry Sewer Imps Stage 1 - Strathfoyle Siphon Storage Tank L'Derry Sewer Imps Stage 1 - Strathfoyle Siphon Storage Tank	Shearwater Consortium (Do Not Use)	102	01/05/2008
KC315	Ballymoney/Coleraine Sewers	Bradley and Co.	24	01/05/2008
JL752	Reservoir Rehabilitation Western Area Phase 2	Graham Structural Repairs	142	29/04/2008
JR406	Knockagh Road, Woodburn, Carrickfergus Replacement Watermain	Campbell Quinn JV Ltd	31	28/04/2008
KT375	Prince William Road, Lisburn Foul Sewer Extension	Farrans Construction Ltd	107	24/04/2008
JB647	Reservoir Rehabilitation Northern Area - Phase 2	BSG Civil Engineering Ltd	44	21/04/2008

Project No	Project Name	Contractor	A3 Total £K	Approved Date
JR408	Belfast City Centre public Realm Phase 1, Area 3	Farrans Construction Ltd	480	21/04/2008
JT126	Lisburn North Rural Zone Watermain Improvements	Enterprise/Farrans	564	21/04/2008
JB501	Cashelton Zone Watermain Improvements	Charles Brand - Holleran JV	1956	21/04/2008
JF006	Altmore/Gortlenaghan Zone Watermain Improvements	Enterprise/Farrans	1446	21/04/2008
KC294	Ballymoney Sewerage Improvements	T. O Connell & Sons	1727	04/04/2008
JS219	North Down, Bangor Zone Watermain Improvements	Enterprise/Farrans	1296	03/04/2008
JR304	Castlereagh Zone Watermain Improvements	Enterprise/Farrans	998	03/04/2008
JF007	Seagahan Zone Watermain Improvements	Enterprise/Farrans	1590	03/04/2008
JG018	Castor Bay/Banbridge Zone Watermain Improvements	Enterprise/Farrans	1640	03/04/2008
JG019	Castor Bay/Craigavon North Watermain Rehabilitation	Enterprise/Farrans	3023	03/04/2008
JG021	Castor Bay/Craigavon South Zone Watermain Rehabilitation	Enterprise/Farrans	1409	03/04/2008
JR367	Service Reservoir Enhanced Security	Time and Data Systems International Ltd	1411	03/04/2008
JB647	Reservoir Rehabilitation Northern Area - Phase 2	BSG Civil Engineering Ltd	106	03/04/2008
JL752	Reservoir Rehabilitation Western Area Phase 2	Maker Freyssinet	121	03/04/2008
JL752	Reservoir Rehabilitation Western Area Phase 2	Maker Freyssinet	99	03/04/2008
KS815	Waste Water Pumping Stations Screens Removal and Pumps Replacement, Ards/Down.	WIS/Gillen JV	455	02/04/2008
KL410	Ballycoleman, Strabane Flood Alleviation Scheme	Purac Brand	1244	28/03/2008

Project No	Project Name	Contractor	A3 Total £K	Approved Date
JN428	Derg West Zone Wm Improvements	Charles Brand - Holleran JV	3550	27/03/2008
KR406	Carrowdore WwTW I	Morrow Group	13	27/03/2008
KR406	Carrowdore WwTW I	WPL Limited	19	27/03/2008
KC313	Rasharkin Flood Alleviation and Sewer Extension	Dawson WAM Ltd	756	27/03/2008
KB374	Tullywiggan WwTW Improvements	Bradley and Co.	59	26/03/2008
KT140	Hugenot drive Lisburn SPS Upgrade	John Graham (Dromore) Ltd	2303	21/03/2008
KR389	Ballyhalbert WwTW Interim Solution	Biwater Graham JV	337	21/03/2008
KR387	Ballywhiskin WwTW Interim Solution	Biwater Graham JV	32	21/03/2008
JP653	Enniskillen New Hospital Watermain Ext	Campbell Quinn JV Ltd	90	18/03/2008
KS224	Downpatrick WwTW	BSG Civil Engineering Ltd	598	13/03/2008
JS112	North Down Strategic Trunk Watermains	Scotts Electrical Services	100	13/03/2008
JB647	Reservoir Rehabilitation Northern Area - Phase 2	BSG Civil Engineering Ltd	42	13/03/2008
JC351	Ballynahone Zone Wm Improvements	Charles Brand - Holleran JV	2297	13/03/2008
KB353	Maghera Area Sewers	Bradley and Co.	185	12/03/2008
KB353	Maghera Area Sewers	Dawson WAM Ltd	306	12/03/2008
KG003	Magheralin Sewerage Scheme	Farrans Construction Ltd	150	10/03/2008
KS384	Darragh Cross WwTw	BSG Civil Engineering Ltd	903	10/03/2008
JB647	Reservoir Rehabilitation Northern Area - Phase 2	BSG Civil Engineering Ltd	240	10/03/2008
KB376	Straw Village Sewer Upgrades	T. O Connell & Sons	52	07/03/2008
KC231	Ballycastle Sewerage Scheme	Dawson WAM Ltd	620	07/03/2008
KC218	Portrush Sewer Improvements Stage 4	John Graham (Dromore) Ltd	1335	05/03/2008

Project No	Project Name	Contractor	A3 Total £K	Approved Date
KR313	Lisbarnet WwTW	Biwater Graham JV	3917	05/03/2008
KT373	Hulls Lane, Lisburn Foul Sewer Extension	W. J. McLaughlin	92	05/03/2008
KF069	Coash Road, Dungannon Storm Sewer Extension	Glen Contracts	15	03/03/2008
KR333	Newtownbreda, Dunmurry, New Holland WWTWs - Nutrient Removal	Biwater Graham JV	223	29/02/2008
KR333	Newtownbreda, Dunmurry, New Holland WWTWs - Nutrient Removal	Biwater Graham JV	197	29/02/2008
KR333	Newtownbreda, Dunmurry, New Holland WWTWs - Nutrient Removal	Biwater Graham JV	197	29/02/2008
KT124	Dromara WwTW	Biwater Graham JV	2967	29/02/2008
KR388	Ballywalter WwTW Interim Solution	Biwater Graham JV	2120	29/02/2008
KR390	Cloughy WwTW Interim Solution	Biwater Graham JV	1649	29/02/2008
KT143	Pounburn WWTW	Biwater Graham JV	749.28	28/02/2008
KC354	Priestland Rd, Bushmills St Sew Ext	Bradley and Co.	123	28/02/2008
KT098	Annahilt WwTW	Biwater Graham JV	4398	28/02/2008
JL752	Reservoir Rehabilitation Western Area Phase 2	Maker Freyssinet	133	28/02/2008
KS206	Seahill WwTW	Biwater Graham JV	4797	27/02/2008
JS224	Lough Cowey Zone Watermain Improvements	McNicholas Construction	620	27/02/2008
KG160	Meadow Lane Portadown Sewer Realignment	Southern Health & Social Care Trust	149	27/02/2008
KF026	Hamiltonsbawn WwTW	Purac Brand	3976	26/02/2008
KX126	Glencam Road, Omagh Storm Sewer	Mills Contracts	157	21/02/2008
KS263	Saintfield WwTW	BSG Civil Engineering Ltd	4945	21/02/2008
KX089	Strabane Road, Castlederg Storm Sewer	W. J. McLaughlin	48	21/02/2008
JL752	Reservoir Rehabilitation Western Area Phase 2	Graham Structural Repairs	275	21/02/2008

Project No	Project Name	Contractor	A3 Total £K	Approved Date
JL752	Reservoir Rehabilitation Western Area Phase 2	Graham Structural Repairs	392	21/02/2008
JL751	Brishey Springs Decommissioning, Dungiven	OConnell - Mills JV	381	21/02/2008
JV820	Carron Hill Supply Zone Management Plan	Campbell Quinn JV Ltd	176	21/02/2008
KL422	Airfield Road, Foul Sewer Extension	McCrossan Contracts LTD	7	21/02/2008
KF076	Gorestown Road Sewerage Scheme	Quinns Automation Ltd	262	21/02/2008
KP373	Galliagh Park Enniskillen Replacement Sewers	Deane Public Works	410	21/02/2008
KG153	Gilford Road Portadown Sewerage Upgrades	BSG Civil Engineering Ltd	354	15/02/2008
KS806	Movilla Road, Newtownards Foul Sewer Extension	ONeill Contracts	134.82	14/02/2008
JA252	Castle Road, Antrim, Watermain	BSG Civil Engineering Ltd	1410	13/02/2008
JV067	Jerrettspass Chlorination	Euro Control Panel Specialists Ltd	17	13/02/2008
JV067	Jerrettspass Chlorination	Sean Murphy Contracts	18	13/02/2008
KV079	McShanes Road, Bessbrook Foul Sewer Extension	Euro Services (NI)	286	13/02/2008
JV023	Fofanny/Banbridge Zone Watermain Improvements	Enterprise/Farrans	1479	08/02/2008
KN592	Crevanagh Road, Omagh, Foul Sewer Pumping Main Extension	Conwell Contracts Ltd	25	08/02/2008
KL423	Creagh Park SPS Abandonment	W. J. McLaughlin	51	07/02/2008
KL418	Londonderry Sewer Imps Stage 1 - Gransha Pumping Station	Purac Brand	1304	07/02/2008
JC369	Newbridge Road, Ballymoney, Replacement Watermain	Campbell Quinn JV Ltd	43	07/02/2008
KG108	Lough Road, Lurgan Storm Sewer Extension	Engineering Services (Terence McGeary)	116	07/02/2008

Project No	Project Name	Contractor	A3 Total £K	Approved Date
JN368	Derg - Omagh Area Transfer Pumps	Farrans Construction Ltd	497	01/02/2008
KF030	Killyman WwTW	Deane Public Works	392	01/02/2008
JR367	Service Reservoir Enhanced Security	OConnell - Mills JV	155	29/01/2008
KB280	Draperstown WwTW	BSG Civil Engineering Ltd	3056	28/01/2008
KL416	Park WWTW	BSG Civil Engineering Ltd	2196	28/01/2008
JP610	Meenacloyabane Service Reservoir	Farrans Construction Ltd	406	23/01/2008
KF027	Benburb/Milltown - RBC Installations West & South	BSG Civil Engineering Ltd	3368	23/01/2008
KT098	Annahilt WwTW	Biwater Graham JV	661	16/01/2008
JC294	Ballinrees West Zone Watermain Improvements	Charles Brand - Holleran JV	3200	16/01/2008
JS220	Bangor Outer Zone Watermain Improvements	Enterprise/Farrans	2022	16/01/2008
JB517	Cookstown Zone WM Improvements	Charles Brand - Holleran JV	2113	16/01/2008
JC349	Portballintrae Zone Wm Improvements	Charles Brand - Holleran JV	2109	16/01/2008
JC352	Loughguile Zone Wm Improvements	Charles Brand - Holleran JV	2817	16/01/2008
JC353	Rasharkin Zone Wm Improvements	Charles Brand - Holleran JV	2291	16/01/2008
JC351	Ballynahone Zone Wm Improvements	Charles Brand - Holleran JV	2167	16/01/2008
KG137	Main Street Glenavy Storm Sewer Extension	Engineering Services (Terence McGeary)	51	14/01/2008
JF007	Seagahan Zone Watermain Improvements	Enterprise/Farrans	1947	14/01/2008
KS809	Carrowdore Sewer Replacement	ONeill Contracts	281	10/01/2008
KA200	Ballycorr Road, Ballyclare, Storm Outfall	T. O Connell & Sons	43	10/01/2008
JP652	Drumharvey & Drumduff Watermain Extension	Campbell Quinn JV Ltd	7	08/01/2008
JB644	Bank Square, Maghera	Campbell Quinn JV Ltd	18	08/01/2008

Project No	Project Name	Contractor	A3 Total £K	Approved Date
KR393	Re-direction of Effluents from Belfast Sludge Incinerator within Belfast WWTW	John Graham (Dromore) Ltd	336	08/01/2008
JA255	Glenavy Road, Crumlin, Replacement Watermain	Campbell Quinn JV Ltd	72	08/01/2008
JB637	Dunmore Lane, Cookstown, Watermain Extension	Campbell Quinn JV Ltd	30	08/01/2008
JC365	Bushtown Road, Coleraine, Watermain Extension	Campbell Quinn JV Ltd	16	08/01/2008
JL693	Cityside Zone Watermain Improvements	Campbell Quinn JV Ltd	309.75	08/01/2008
KP351	Derrylin WwTW	BSG Civil Engineering Ltd	3360	03/01/2008
KS213	Greyabbey/Kircubbin	John Graham (Dromore) Ltd	7	03/01/2008
KS362	Station Road, Crossgar Replacement Sewer	Glen Contracts	54	20/12/2007
KT144	The Square, Hillsborough Storm Sewer Ext.	ONeill Contracts	20	20/12/2007
KA203	Huntingdale Way Ballyclare - SPS Rationalisation	T. O Connell & Sons	10	18/12/2007
KG159	Waringstown WWTW Storm Tanks	BSG Civil Engineering Ltd	497	18/12/2007
KG059	Old Lurgan Road Sewer Extensions	Engineering Services (Terence McGeary)	239	18/12/2007
KV009	Gilford WwTW	BSG Civil Engineering Ltd	1661	18/12/2007
KF029	Bush WwTW	Deane Public Works	241	18/12/2007
KB354	Orritor Road, Cookstown - Sewer Rep.Phase 2	T. O Connell & Sons	36	18/12/2007
KA184	Ballyeaston Road Ballyclare Storm Sewer	Bradley and Co.	67	13/12/2007
JB643	Creagh Hill, Castledawson, Watermain Extension	OConnell - Mills JV	14	13/12/2007
KV117	Spring Meadows/ Riverfields Warrenpoint Foul Sewer Extension	Engineering Services (Terence McGeary)	27	13/12/2007
JC368	Lisheegan Road, Rasharkin	OConnell - Mills JV	19	06/12/2007

Project No	Project Name	Contractor	A3 Total £K	Approved Date
JL749	Letterlougher Road Claudy First Time Services Extension	OConnell - Mills JV	14	06/12/2007
KR395	Cloghan Park, Belfast Flood Alleviation	ONeill Contracts	182	06/12/2007
KF031	Cabragh WwTW	McFadden Ltd	177	06/12/2007
KG148	Mark Street Lurgan Storm Sewer Extension	McFadden Ltd	73	29/11/2007
KC352	Castleroe Road Coleraine Foul Sewer Extension	Bradley and Co.	19	27/11/2007
KA188	Steeple Road Antrim - Replacement Sewer	T. O Connell & Sons	39	27/11/2007
JL693	Cityside Zone Watermain Improvements	OConnell - Mills JV	483	21/11/2007
JL693	Cityside Zone Watermain Improvements	Campbell Quinn JV Ltd	445	21/11/2007
KS212	Portaferry WwTW	WIS/Gillen JV	5940	19/11/2007
KN571	Derry Road Storm Sewer	McFadden Ltd	87	19/11/2007
KR343	O'Neill Road, Glengormley Storm Sewer Extension	ONeill Contracts	44	19/11/2007
KA199	Antrim Rd, Aldergrove - Trunk Sewer Replacement	T. G. Eakin	273	13/11/2007
KS377	Downs Road/Castle Park Sewer Upgrade/ Attenuation	Lagan Construction Ltd	168	13/11/2007
KL414	Drumahoe Sewerage Scheme SPS	BSG Civil Engineering Ltd	1581	13/11/2007
KG134	Carrick Drive, Banbridge Road Lurgan Storm Sewer Ext	Quinns Automation Ltd	11	08/11/2007
KS376	Newcastle Sewer Networks Improvements	BSG Civil Engineering Ltd	268	08/11/2007
KS381	North Road, Newtownards Storm	P. F. Murphy	297	08/11/2007
JG071	Dublinhill Road Dromore Watermain Extension	McNicholas Construction	0	08/11/2007
KR346	Ivanhoe Avenue Belfast Storm & Foul Sewer Replacement	Rodgers Contracts Ltd	139	05/11/2007

Project No	Project Name	Contractor	A3 Total £K	Approved Date
KV108	School Road, Newtownhamilton Storm Sewer Wxtension	Glen Contracts	34	05/11/2007
KF048	Moor Gardens Sewer Upgrades	Conwell Contracts Ltd	529	31/10/2007
JN482	Killymore Road, Gortin Pumping Station	Campbell Quinn JV Ltd	266	31/10/2007
KA202	The Woods, Old Glenarm Road, Larne, Storm Sewer Outfall	Bradley and Co.	45	30/10/2007
KR382	Salinity Removal from Sewerage System discharging to new North Down WwTW	John Graham (Dromore) Ltd	39	30/10/2007
KC355	Bravallan Road Ballymoney Storm Sewer	T. O Connell & Sons	51	30/10/2007
KC323	Finvoy Road Ballymoney Sewerage Scheme	T. O Connell & Sons	198	30/10/2007
KP366	Kinoughtra, Teemore Storm Sewer Extension	Campbell Contracts Ltd	32	30/10/2007
KR357	Loughview Terrace Greenisland Storm Sewer	Rodgers Contracts Ltd	33	30/10/2007
JL736	Reservoir Rehabilitation Western Area Phase1	Graham Structural Repairs	491	30/10/2007
KR323	Ligoniel Sewerage Scheme	Cityside Development Ltd.	191	30/10/2007
KS215	Annalong WwTW	BSG Civil Engineering Ltd	328	29/10/2007
JB547	Reservoir Rehabilitation Northern Area Phase 1	Maker Freyssinet	497	24/10/2007
JB547	Reservoir Rehabilitation Northern Area Phase 1	BSG Civil Engineering Ltd	181	24/10/2007
JB547	Reservoir Rehabilitation Northern Area Phase 1	Maker Freyssinet	148	24/10/2007
JP649	Deerpark Lane watermain extension	Campbell Quinn JV Ltd	22	24/10/2007
KR392	Burren Way, Cregagh	ONeill Contracts	128	24/10/2007
KG149	Dunkirk Road Waringstown Storm and Foul Sewer Extensions	Glen Contracts	64	22/10/2007
KV116	Abbey Park Kilkeel Sewer Replacement	BSG Civil Engineering Ltd	499	19/10/2007

Project No	Project Name	Contractor	A3 Total £K	Approved Date
KG127	Madden Road Tandragee Storm and Foul Sewer Extensions	Campbell Contracts Ltd	199	19/10/2007
KV033	Warrenpoint WwTW	BSG Civil Engineering Ltd	2846	19/10/2007
JS220	Bangor Outer Zone Watermain Improvements	McNicholas Construction	100	18/10/2007
JR302	Purdysburn East Zone Watermain Improvements	Enterprise/Farrans	1511	16/10/2007
JR304	Castlereagh Zone Watermain Improvements	Enterprise/Farrans	1705	16/10/2007
KF062	Cavanacaw Road, Storm Sewer	Glen Contracts	464	16/10/2007
JB518	Stewartstown Zone WM Improvements	Campbell Quinn JV Ltd	10	16/10/2007
KF078	Dungormley	Glen Contracts	34	16/10/2007
KV144	Dromore Street Rathfriland Storm Sewer Extension	Engineering Services (Terence McGeary)	11	16/10/2007
KV042	Cullaville WwTW	BSG Civil Engineering Ltd	986	08/10/2007
JF574	Carland Bridge (Cookstown Rd) Road Realignment	Campbell Quinn JV Ltd	22	05/10/2007
KV141	Limekiln Road Newry Foul Sewer Extension	Engineering Services (Terence McGeary)	12	05/10/2007
KN607	Creagmore Road, Drumquin Foul Sewer Ext	Engineering Services (Terence McGeary)	40	05/10/2007
KP587	Lisnagole Road Lisnaskea Foul Sewer Ext	Glen Contracts	37	03/10/2007
JL736	Reservoir Rehabilitation Western Area Phase1	Graham Structural Repairs	497	03/10/2007
KV058	Castlewellan Forest Park SPS	Campbell Contracts Ltd	179	03/10/2007
KL314	Limavady WwTW	WIS/Gillen JV	5970	01/10/2007
KV097	Belleeks WwTW	Quinns Automation Ltd	541	28/09/2007
KG147	Carbet Road Portadown Storm Sewer	Glen Contracts	43	26/09/2007
KP299	Enniskillen WwTW	Purac Brand	12650	26/09/2007
JL736	Reservoir Rehabilitation Western Area Phase1	BSG Civil Engineering Ltd	98	26/09/2007
KA170	Coastguard Road Larne	Bradley and Co.	235	25/09/2007

Project No	Project Name	Contractor	A3 Total £K	Approved Date
KF066	Rear of 25 Main Street, Storm Sewer Extension	Euro Services (NI)	19	25/09/2007
JL746	Balteagh Watermain Extension, Limavady	OConnell - Mills JV	7	25/09/2007
KN605	Loughmacrory Storm Sewer Extension.	McCrossan Contracts LTD	29	25/09/2007
KN584	Gortin Road Omagh Storm Sewer	Campbell Contracts Ltd	129	25/09/2007
KF077	Poyntzpass WwTW Inlet Sewer Replacement	Glen Contracts	35	14/09/2007
KV069	Carrickmacstay SPS Upgrade/Replacement	Deane Public Works	119	14/09/2007
KR341	Demesne Road Hollywood Foul & Storm Sewer	Farrans Construction Ltd	44	11/09/2007
KR338	360-368 Doagh Road, Newtownabbey Sewer Extension	Rodgers Contracts Ltd	39	11/09/2007
KC330	Ballylagan Road, Islandmore	Bradley and Co.	13	11/09/2007
KR365	Springbank Industrial Estate Foul Sewer Ext	P. F. Murphy	0	11/09/2007
JR377	Hightown Road, Newtownabbey Watermain.	Farrans Construction Ltd	127	11/09/2007
JA251	Crosshill Service Reservoir Water Booster Station, Larne	Campbell Quinn JV Ltd	89	11/09/2007
KR313	Lisbarnet WwTW	Biwater Graham JV	350	07/09/2007
KL419	Londonderry Sewer Imps Stage 1 - Strathfoyle Siphon Storage Tank L'Derry Sewer Imps Stage 1 - Strathfoyle Siphon Storage Tank	Purac Brand	890	06/09/2007
KN586	Killen WWTW	BSG Civil Engineering Ltd	1296	06/09/2007
JV818	CARRICK RD WARRENPOINT WATERMAIN EXTENSION	Farrans Construction Ltd	25	04/09/2007
JG069	Limekiln Lane, Aghalee WM Ext	Farrans Construction Ltd	28	04/09/2007
JV123	Ashtree Hill Drumbanagher WM Ext	Farrans Construction Ltd	26	04/09/2007

Project No	Project Name	Contractor	A3 Total £K	Approved Date
JS276	Kilmegan Road, Dundrum, Watermain	Farrans Construction Ltd	72	04/09/2007
KG131	Lurgan Road, Aghalee Storm Sewer Ext	McFadden Ltd	24	04/09/2007
KS309	Raholp WwTW	John Graham (Dromore) Ltd	926	04/09/2007
JL736	Reservoir Rehabilitation Western Area Phase1	Maker Freyssinet	112	31/08/2007
JA238	Antrim Ring Main Relocation	Campbell Quinn JV Ltd	415	31/08/2007
JB635	Pound Road, Magherafelt	OConnell - Mills JV	9	31/08/2007
KL417	Londonderry Sewer Imps Stage 1 - Victoria Market Pumping Station and Fahan Street Relief Sewer	Purac Brand	4069	24/08/2007
JF577	Ballyloughan Road, Hamiltonsbawn, Armagh Wm Ext	Campbell Quinn JV Ltd	18	24/08/2007
JF576	Lisbeg Rd Watermain Ext (2007)	Campbell Quinn JV Ltd	23	24/08/2007
KS357	Sketrick Island, Whiterock Sewerage Facilities	Rodgers Contracts Ltd	62	24/08/2007
KG085	Clonmakate SPS Replacement	Conwell Contracts Ltd	100	24/08/2007
KT128	Thornleigh Park, Lisburn Foul & Storm Sewer Upgrade	P. F. Murphy	90	24/08/2007
KV072	Rooneys Meadow Foul Sewer to Replace SPS	Engineering Services (Terence McGeary)	55	24/08/2007
KR323	Ligoniel Sewerage Scheme	John Graham (Dromore) Ltd	823	17/08/2007
KV063	Newry Sewerage Networks Improvements	Euro Services (NI)	484	17/08/2007
JN389	Rezoning of Lenamore Springs Supply Area	Campbell Quinn JV Ltd	261	14/08/2007
KV128	Sheetrim Road Cullyhanna Foul Sewer Extension	Quinns Automation Ltd	70	08/08/2007
KT130	Mill Turn Dromore SPS Upgrade	Engineering Services (Terence McGeary)	22	08/08/2007
JL744	Old Eglish Road, Dungannon, Watermain Extension	Campbell Quinn JV Ltd	23	01/08/2007

Project No	Project Name	Contractor	A3 Total £K	Approved Date
JN479	Tirwinney.Watermain Extension	Campbell Quinn JV Ltd	16	30/07/2007
JG066	Manse Road, Ballyward Watermain Extension	Farrans Construction Ltd	23	24/07/2007
JB634	Battery	Campbell Quinn JV Ltd	51	24/07/2007
JL736	Reservoir Rehabilitation Western Area Phase1	BSG Civil Engineering Ltd	54	24/07/2007
JL736	Reservoir Rehabilitation Western Area Phase1	BSG Civil Engineering Ltd	331	24/07/2007
JL736	Reservoir Rehabilitation Western Area Phase1	Graham Structural Repairs	33	24/07/2007
JS253	Shore Road, Millisle Sewer & Watermain Replacement	Farrans Construction Ltd	207	24/07/2007
JS254	Moss Road, Millisle Sewer & Watermain Replacement	Farrans Construction Ltd	200	24/07/2007
KV031	Hilltown WwTW	BSG Civil Engineering Ltd	1411	19/07/2007
KA158	Milltown, Antrim WwTW	BSG Civil Engineering Ltd	20254	19/07/2007
JF569	Ballygawley/CabraghSR Link Main	Campbell Quinn JV Ltd	131	19/07/2007
JF578	College Hall Lane, Tynan, Watermain Extension	Campbell Quinn JV Ltd	7	19/07/2007
JA250	Kilbride Road/Bryantang Road, Doagh, Watermain Extension	Campbell Quinn JV Ltd	33	06/07/2007
JB547	Reservoir Rehabilitation Northern Area Phase 1	BSG Civil Engineering Ltd	289	06/07/2007
KB388	Gortgole Road Portglenone Storm Sewer Outfall	Bradley and Co.	107	22/06/2007
JC319	Beechfield Drive, Coleraine Water Pumping Station	T. O Connell & Sons	34	22/06/2007
KF014	Clare Village Sewerage Scheme	BSG Civil Engineering Ltd	1286	22/06/2007
JC364	Ballinlea Road, Stranocum, Replacement Watermain	OConnell - Mills JV	150	22/06/2007
JC363	Barnside Road, Garvagh, Watermain Extension	OConnell - Mills JV	40	22/06/2007

Project No	Project Name	Contractor	A3 Total £K	Approved Date
JR404	Belfast City Centre Public Realm Phase 1, Area 1	Farrans Construction Ltd	349	22/06/2007
KN583	Beragh Foul & Storm Sewer	Campbell Contracts Ltd	50	22/06/2007
JG062	Lisnisky Lane/Portadown Road, Portadown	Farrans Construction Ltd	347	19/06/2007
KG132	Bleary Road, Bleary Storm and Foul Sewer Ext	Campbell Contracts Ltd	39	19/06/2007
KG143	Silverwood Golf Course Replacement Sewer	Quinns Automation Ltd	47	19/06/2007
KG126	Gobrana Road Glenavy Storm Sewer Extension	Engineering Services (Terence McGeary)	57	08/06/2007
JL743	Removal of Stradreagh Spring Source	Campbell Quinn JV Ltd	85	08/06/2007
KV115	The Meadows Newry Trunk Relief Sewer	Engineering Services (Terence McGeary)	148	08/06/2007
KV095	Upper Dromore Rd, Warrenpoint, Storm Sewer Extension	McFadden Ltd	107	08/06/2007
JB547	Reservoir Rehabilitation Northern Area Phase 1	BSG Civil Engineering Ltd	79	31/05/2007
JB547	Reservoir Rehabilitation Northern Area Phase 1	BSG Civil Engineering Ltd	123	31/05/2007
JN476	INISCLAN PUMPING MAIN EXTENSION	Campbell Quinn JV Ltd	38	31/05/2007
JN472	Backglen Road, Omagh Booster Station	Campbell Quinn JV Ltd	20	31/05/2007
JP648	Derryclawan,Lisbellaw. Watermain Extension.	Campbell Quinn JV Ltd	12	31/05/2007
JN478	Meenacloy Road. Watermain Extension	Campbell Quinn JV Ltd	11	31/05/2007
KF081	Killyman Foul Sewer Extension	Engineering Services (Terence McGeary)	11	23/05/2007
JV115	Lurgan Road / Ballygowan Road Alignment	Farrans Construction Ltd	63	22/05/2007
KV106	Ballymoyer Road Whitecross Storm Sewer Extension and Foul Sewer Upgrade	Engineering Services (Terence McGeary)	48	21/05/2007
JR402	Hydepark Service Reservoir Integrity	Graham Structural Repairs	155	21/05/2007

Project No	Project Name	Contractor	A3 Total £K	Approved Date
KF068	Drummanmore Road, Armagh Storm Sewer	Glen Contracts	66	21/05/2007
KV013	Rostrevor Sewerage Scheme	BSG Civil Engineering Ltd	615	21/05/2007
JB629	Bancran Road, Draperstown, Watermain Extension	OConnell - Mills JV	24	03/05/2007
JN477	Culvacullion Road, Watermain Extension	OConnell - Mills JV	56	03/05/2007
KG124	Old Newry Road, Banbridge Storm and Foul Sewer Extensions	Campbell Contracts Ltd	57	03/05/2007
JB633	Knockanully Road, Martinstown, Watermain Extension	Campbell Quinn JV Ltd	7	23/04/2007
JA249	Craigstown Road, Randalstown, Watermain Extension	Campbell Quinn JV Ltd	14	23/04/2007
KG115	Rose gardens Laurelvale Proposed Foul Sewer	Glen Contracts	35	20/04/2007
KF065	Trotters Walk to Madden Road, Tandragee Sewer Upgrade	Conwell Contracts Ltd	253	20/04/2007
JL736	Reservoir Rehabilitation Western Area Phase1	Graham Structural Repairs	492	20/04/2007
KN568	Donagheday Rd, Strabane	McCrossan Contracts LTD	63	16/04/2007
JC295	Altnahinch Zone Watermain Improvements	Charles Brand - Holleran JV	3627	16/04/2007
KV119	Quarter Road Camlough Storm and Foul Sewer Extensions	Euro Services (NI)	30	16/04/2007
KG116	Aghalee/Aghagllon Screens	BSG Civil Engineering Ltd	473	04/04/2007
KP374	Teemore SPS pumps and pumping main replacement	P. Clarke & Sons Ltd	62	04/04/2007
JB461	Lough Fea Zone WM Improvements	Charles Brand - Holleran JV	3045	02/04/2007
JB508	Cargan Zone Watermain Improvementss	Charles Brand - Holleran JV	3064	02/04/2007

Note: Key Abbreviations used in Tables

■ **WWTW** Wastewater Treatment Works

- **WWPS** Wastewater Pumping Station
- **WTW** Water Treatment Works
- **PS** Pumping Station
- **SPS** Sewage Pumping Station
- **SR** Service Reservoir
- **WM** Watermain
- **DAP** Drainage Area Plan
- **CSO** Combined Sewer Overflow
- **O/F** Outfall

Contract for Street Lighting Maintenance

Ms D Purvis asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 776/11, in relation to the previous contract for street lighting maintenance, what was the total value of the contract at end date 25 July 2010.

(AQW 1060/11)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the total value of the contract, during both the original contract, which was let on a one plus one year basis, and the extended contract period, up to the end date of 25 July 2010, was £33.4 million.

The original estimated annual value at the pre-award stage was £8.6million however, the volume of work carried out from year to year, and indeed quarters, on term contracts is dictated by operational demands and can vary considerably.

Childcare Provision

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) his Department's criteria for any funding of childcare provision; and (ii) how much his Department has invested in childcare provision in each of the last three years, including Sure Start programmes.

(AQW 1104/11)

Minister for Regional Development: The Department for Regional Development does not fund any external childcare provision.

Staff in DRD, as with those in other Departments, may apply for reimbursement of any reasonable additional childcare costs which they incur if required to attend work outside their normal working pattern. Staff may also avail of the NICS Salary Sacrifice Childcare Voucher Scheme, which enables participants to reduce the cost of registered childcare through Income Tax and National Insurance contribution relief.

Consultants

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 626/11, which firm completed the contract following the termination of arrangements with Contracting Out.

(AQW 1117/11)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that, as detailed in AQW 626/11, a firm was appointed to act on its behalf as both expert witness and forensic accountant. The firm involved was Deloitte.

Cost of Defending Litigation

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development what the legal costs were to his Department of defending litigation cases in each of the last three years.

(AQW 1135/11)

Minister for Regional Development: The Department's legal costs of defending litigation cases for the last three financial years is set out as follows:

2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
£792,481	£1,455,332	£1,204,890

A further £978,778 has been spent on ongoing commercial litigation matters since 1 April 2007.

City of Culture 2013 in Derry

Mr R McCartney asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he has identified any funding from his Department's budget to be allocated to the City of Culture 2013 in Derry; and if so, how much and for what specific purpose, projects or programmes in the City of Culture is this money intended.

(AQW 1141/11)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department has a number of projects in progress or under development which would significantly improve the transport infrastructure serving the city of Derry and so contribute to the City of Culture 2013.

The following table lists those projects and provides details of the latest budgets for 2010-11, together with bids submitted for the first three years of the Budget 2010 process up to 2013-14.

FUNDING BEYOND 2010-11 WILL BE SUBJECT TO THE OUTCOME OF THE CURRENT SPENDING REVIEW EXERCISE.

Programme/ Project	2010-11 (£m)	Budget Bids submitted 2011-12 (£m)	Budget Bids submitted 2012-13 (£m)	Budget Bids submitted 2013-14 (£m)
Derry to Coleraine Track Relay	2.0	11.9	66.8	7.2
New Trains – these will increase capacity and frequency and improve services on the network including the Derry line.	28.6	70.7	8.4	72.0
New Buses - these will be used across the region, including Derry.	6.4	13.5	13.2	13.0
Dual Carriageway from Maydown to the City of Derry Airport	5.9	-	-	-
A6 Derry to Dungiven	-	1.5	3.2	62.5

Programme/ Project	2010-11 (£m)	Budget Bids submitted 2011-12 (£m)	Budget Bids submitted 2012-13 (£m)	Budget Bids submitted 2013-14 (£m)
A5 Derry to Aughnacloy	-	15.0	165.0	285.0

Omagh Access Forum

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 90/11, (i) if his Department sought guidance from the Omagh Access Forum in relation to the placement of disabled parking bays in the car park in Perry Street, Dungannon; and (ii) whether the Omagh Access Forum (a) declined to provide such guidance; or (b) advised that disabled parking bays were not required in the free section.

(AQW 1186/11)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it did not seek guidance from Omagh Access Forum in relation to the placement of disabled parking bays in Dungannon. However, Omagh Access Forum did provide general guidance to Roads Service in relation to the positioning of disabled parking bays within car parks.

Footpaths

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans his Department has to improve the footpaths in the Ashfield Estate, Donaghadee.

(AQW 1202/11)

Minister for Regional Development: I understand that the Member met officials from my Department's Roads Service recently at the Ashfield Estate in Donaghadee.

I can confirm that, as agreed at the meeting, Roads Service has proposed to carry out improvements to some sections of the worst areas of footway within the estate. However, the timing and scale of the works will depend upon other competing demands and availability of funding.

Northern Ireland Water

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister for Regional Development what steps he intends to take to address the low level of staff morale within Northern Ireland Water, as highlighted in the recent survey carried out to assess the level of confidence staff have in the management at Northern Ireland Water.

(AQW 1241/11)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that it has had a challenging year and this is reflected in the results of the recent staff survey. NIW's Executive Committee considered the findings of the survey in August and an action plan to address the issues raised has been agreed. The action plan will be implemented over the coming months and will involve both staff and management.

Regional Development Strategy

Mr B Wilson asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the extent to which the drafting of the revised Regional Development Strategy is hindered by his Department's limited role in the operation of the airports.

(AQO 331/11)

Minister for Regional Development: The drafting of the revised Regional Development Strategy is at an advanced stage and it is my intention to seek Executive approval early in November to go to public consultation.

The RDS is material to decisions on development proposals for local airports and their associated transport infrastructure and the draft recognises the significant role that our airports have in accessing markets, encouraging inward investment and boosting tourism.

Airports are however privately owned and the operators of the airports are responsible for decisions on commercial matters.

Roads: Gritting

Mr T Lunn asked the Minister for Regional Development how much extra salt and grit Roads Service will have available for the coming winter compared to last year.

(AQO 332/11)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that as part of the pre-season preparations, salt barns which are strategically placed in depots throughout the North are being filled to capacity.

It is estimated that around 65,000 tonnes of salt will be available for the coming winter period. This is more than enough to treat scheduled roads during a typical winter.

Roads Service also has arrangements in place to supplement stocks during the winter period, if necessary.

Cycling

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline the reasons for the decrease in the cycling budget, given his commitment to the promotion of sustainable transport.

(AQO 333/11)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service aims to provide safer roads for vulnerable road users, including cyclists, utilising a range of measures that include road safety engineering, traffic calming and enhancement of the pedestrian and cycling network. All of which are funded from the Local Transport and Safety Measure allocation.

As you are aware, there has been a reduction in the funding available for cycling measures due to uncertainties relating to this year's funding position.

However, I feel it is important to stress that, although there is reduced funding provision for cycle lanes and footways this year, the published Roads Service Targets do not reflect the same level of reduction. For example, in 2009/10, Roads Service's budget was £981,000 with an associated target to provide 20 km of cycle lanes. This year with a £108,000 allocation, which is an 89% reduction, the target is to provide 12km of cycle lane, which equates to a 40% reduction.

Roads Service's Traffic Engineers are conscious of the financial limitations and are implementing relatively inexpensive cycle lanes on road with 'signs and lines', as opposed to the construction of more expensive segregated cycle lanes.

Also most Strategic Road Improvement (SRI) schemes implemented by Roads Service provide Active Travel facilities as part of the finished scheme. For example, on the newly constructed Newry By-Pass, an additional 7.6km of footway and 2.3km of combined Cycle lane/footway have been provided, whilst the new Southern Distributor road in Newtownards, provided an additional 6km of footway and 2.5km of cycle lanes.

In addition, my Department's Travelwise team targets schools, businesses and commuters to promote and facilitate walking, cycling, public transport and car sharing as healthier and more environmentally friendly alternatives to the private car.

Regional Development Strategy

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister for Regional Development what progress has been made on the review of the Regional Development Strategy.

(AQO 334/11)

Minister for Regional Development: The review of the Regional Development Strategy is now very well advanced.

As the new RDS will be the cross cutting spatial strategy of the Executive we have been actively involved with a number of key groups to assist in the Review. These include an External Working Group; the Regional Development Committee; officials from the Strategic Investment Board and an Inter-Departmental Steering Group. The Ministerial Sub-Group overseeing the review met most recently on 23 September 2010.

I intend to seek Executive agreement in early November for full public consultation to commence as soon as possible.

Flooding: East Belfast

Mr C Lytle asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the East Belfast Flood Alleviation Scheme.

(AQO 335/11)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that, following the completion of a Drainage Area Study in East Belfast, it is currently considering several options for remedial work to improve the performance of the sewerage network in the area.

Some elements of the work, relating to flood alleviation, have been advanced for early implementation. This includes a £2 million scheme to address a longstanding flooding problem at Montgomery Road and a £250,000 scheme at Hamel Drive. Both schemes, which are scheduled to commence in early 2011, should substantially reduce the risk of flooding in these areas.

Road Maintenance

Mr D Kennedy asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the Department's road maintenance budget.

(AQO 336/11)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it has been independently established, that some £112 million per annum (2010 prices) is required to maintain the structural integrity of the road network in the North. However, the structural maintenance budget for 2010/11 is currently estimated at £70m, leaving a shortfall of £42 million.

I should explain that 'Structural Maintenance' is the collective term for activities that maintain the integrity of the road and footway structure. The main activities include carriageway resurfacing and reconstruction, surface dressing, patching and structural drainage. The structural maintenance undertaken by Roads Service comprises of more cost effective planned maintenance activities, such as resurfacing and surface dressing, as well as the less efficient action of reactive patching.

The current level of funding is no longer sustainable, as the cost of reactive patching, is increasing year on year. The underinvestments of previous spending periods has created a downward spiral, and now, as pavements deteriorate through a lack of planned maintenance, they are having to be repaired by the relatively expensive process of patching to minimise the risk of public liability claims and maintain road safety. This process, in turn, draws further funds away from better value maintenance activities, such as resurfacing and surface dressing.

Of course, it is always the case that if more funding was available, more maintenance work would be carried out, and I can assure you that Roads Service will continue to make strong bids for additional

structural maintenance funds. In the meantime, Roads Service will continue to make the best use of resources available to it to develop and maintain the road network.

Comber Greenway

Lord Browne asked the Minister for Regional Development if he has any plans to upgrade the Comber Greenway in East Belfast.

(AQO 337/11)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it is responsible for maintaining the Comber Greenway, and that it has no plans to upgrade it at this time.

The Member will be aware that the Strategic Outline Case for Rapid Transit identified the Comber Greenway as the preferred route in East Belfast. However, in order to ensure that Rapid Transit provides the best level of service for passengers, and represents best value for money, my Department is undertaking preliminary designs for a number of route alignment options for the pilot network. Between Dundonald and Hollywood Arches, the route alignment options being considered are the Comber Greenway and the Upper Newtownards Road.

DRD: Signage

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Regional Development what responsibility his Department has for the removal of unauthorised signage from departmental property and whether he has had any discussions with the PSNI or other agencies regarding this issue.

(AQO 338/11)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that Commercial Advertising Hoardings are normally the subject of a planning application and any infringements of planning laws would normally be pursued by DOE Planning Service under the relevant planning legislation.

Where advertising hoardings are erected illegally on Roads Service property, action is taken by Roads Service to try and remove these under Article 87 of the Roads (NI) Order 1993. This Article deals with advertisements, pictures, signs, etc. unlawfully affixed to the surface of a road, or any tree, structure or other works in or on a road, i.e. on Roads Service property.

Article 21(1) of the Roads (Northern Ireland) Order 1993 states that, "any person who erects or exhibits, or causes or permits to be erected or exhibited, any advertisement or notice which is sited or designed wholly or mainly for the purpose of being visible to persons using a special road or which is likely to prejudice the safety of traffic using a special road, shall be guilty of an offence and liable under summary conviction to a fine".

I can confirm that where an advertising hoarding is erected illegally on Roads Service property, or adjacent to special roads, action is taken by Roads Service to try and remove these under Articles 87 & 21 respectively of the Roads (NI) Order 1993. The motorway and part of the Westlink are examples of Special Roads.

I can also confirm that no discussions have taken place with the PSNI or other agencies regarding the removal of commercial advertising signs.

Department for Social Development

Small Pockets of Deprivation Funding

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the continuation of the Small Pockets of Deprivation funding for community workers in the Rathgill estate Bangor.

(AQW 8/11)

Minister for Social Development (Mr A Attwood): Funding for the community workers in the Rathgill estate in Bangor has been approved to cover the period up to 31 March 2011. As you are no doubt aware, my Department's budget for 2011/12 and subsequent years will be set as part of the Budget 2010 process which is currently underway. I am unable to enter into any funding commitments beyond 31 March 2011 until that process is completed at the end of the year.

Parents Living in Poverty

Mr D McKay asked the Minister for Social Development what steps he is taking to ensure that parents living in poverty receive adequate support.

(AQW 672/11)

Minister for Social Development: My Department actively supports parents living in poverty. The extent of work is broad, so this answer is illustrative of DSD commitments on the issue. This support includes the payment of a wide range of social security benefits which directly assist them in their daily lives and provides practical support in addressing poverty. These benefits include Income Support for those on a low income, Jobseeker's Allowance for those looking for work and Employment and Support Allowance to help those with an illness or disability move into work. In addition Disability Living Allowance may be payable to parents if they or their children need help with personal care or have walking difficulties because they have a physical or mental disability. Additional financial support for families is provided by HM Revenue and Customs through the Child Benefit and Tax Credits schemes.

My Department is committed to ensuring that parents living in poverty access benefits to which they are entitled and the Social Security Agency is committed to promoting benefit entitlement. It has an extensive benefit uptake programme which includes outreach services for example staff from across the Agency provided information and advice to those attending the recent Disability Exhibition event in Lisburn. The Agency also participates in local promotional activity, produces specific publications (including minority language versions) and provides general assistance with information and advice through the network of benefit offices. This is supplemented by the NI Direct website which displays information on all benefits and includes an online Benefit Adviser Service.

In addition to these general measures, the Agency introduced a specific benefit uptake programme in 2005 targeting those with potential benefit entitlement. Some of these exercises specifically targeted adults with children. To date over 15,000 parents have been contacted and encouraged to find out about benefit entitlement. These exercises have generated nearly £5 million in additional benefit and arrears for nearly 500 people.

The 2010/11 benefit uptake programme will provide 19,000 people with the opportunity of a benefit assessment in conjunction with the Citizens Advice Bureau.

My Department also supports a wide range of schemes through the Executive's Neighbourhood Renewal Programmes which seeks to address the underlying causes of poverty in our most deprived areas and provides impartial information and advice on a range of issues. Over 110,000 households in 36 areas benefit from the activities, brought forward in Neighbourhood Renewal Action Plans. These plans have been drawn up in partnership with communities and have been supported by £60 million from my Department in the last 3 years. This investment enables a range of services to be provided which counter the social, economic and physical determinants of poverty. Over 53,000 of the households in these neighbourhoods are composed of parents with children.

Through the Child Maintenance and Enforcement Division we provide information and support around the different child maintenance options available to separated parents. The Division also provides an effective maintenance collection and enforcement service.

My Department, through the Women's Centre Childcare Fund (WCCF), currently provides funding of £900,000 per annum to 13 Women's Centres to support childcare services for women living in disadvantaged areas. This pays for almost 2500 2-hour weekly places for children and is geared to support the work with women in areas of highest deprivation. This enables services to be provided to significant numbers of single, unemployed and/or stay at home women and mothers to make a positive

contribution to the lives of their children, extended family and development initiatives within their local community. This work has empowered individual mothers to make a much greater contribution to the education and development of their children and has raised educational aspiration within whole families. My Department also provides funds in partnership with local councils through the Community Support Programme which addresses the needs of our most deprived and disadvantaged communities and offers help and support to parents, families and children in greatest need.

Social Security Agency

Mr J Craig asked the Minister for Social Development how many people have been interviewed under caution as a result of pro-active fraud investigation initiatives undertaken by the Social Security Agency in the last two years.

(AQW 712/11)

Minister for Social Development: The Social Security Agency has been pro-active over the last number of years in developing initiatives to maximise its counter fraud efforts. For example, steps taken recently have broadened the Agency's scope for data matching while the use of risk scoring to target cases more likely to involve criminality is now well established and refined. This pro-active approach has been successful with the number of sanctions from fraud investigations in 2009/10 reaching its highest level yet of 982. In addition, there have been specific pro-active exercises undertaken by the benefit fraud team in response to emerging risks. There have been 17 such exercises undertaken by the Agency's Benefit Investigation Service in the last 2 financial years. Of these, 5 involved interviews under caution, comprising a total of 13 people.

Funding for Age Sector Community and Voluntary Groups

Mr A McQuillan asked the Minister for Social Development whether he intends to continue the current level of funding for age sector community and voluntary groups.

(AQW 718/11)

Minister for Social Development: Whilst my Department does not have specific policy responsibility for the age sector, we do provide funding to a number of voluntary and community groups that provide services to many elderly citizens.

As the Budget 2011-15 outcomes are not yet known, it is not possible to give commitments about the future. I did write on 21 September 2010 to my Ministerial colleagues emphasising:

- (i) the important role of the Voluntary and Community Sector in meeting the needs of the most vulnerable in our society;
- (ii) the need for a partnership approach in helping to develop and strengthen services to the most disadvantaged; and,
- (iii) encouraging Executive and Ministerial colleagues to give due regard to the needs of the most vulnerable in our community.

Public Realm Works

Mr G Savage asked the Minister for Social Development what his Department is doing to ensure that materials used for public realm works are sourced in Northern Ireland.

(AQW 754/11)

Minister for Social Development: There are a number of factors that are to be taken into account when planning for my Department's public realm schemes.

DSD delivers Public Realm (PR) schemes in urban areas across NI often in conjunction with the relevant council. In many circumstances schemes are tendered by the Department for Finance and Personnel's Central Procurement Directorate or the Department for Regional Development's Roads Service, who act as our Centre of Procurement Excellence ensuring value for money. The tendering process for public realm schemes requires potential contractors to demonstrate their environmental,

economic and social sustainability credentials. This involves not only the employment of local companies for labour but also the sourcing and use of local materials where feasible.

Whilst it is desirable to utilise locally sourced materials for a number of factors, imported materials may offer better overall value even after transport costs are factored in. Much of the street furniture used in PR has long been manufactured in other countries but is sourced to best match the local vernacular. It is possible that economies of scale make it prohibitive for local firms to fabricate the various styles and in the different materials used for street furniture in different locations.

In Conservation Areas, the planners can be prescriptive around what materials they want to see used and detailed consideration had to be given on the use of materials. Sometimes the choice of materials is driven by these conservation/planning considerations. In Newcastle for example, Mourne granite was considered at the design stage. However, quarrying restrictions in that area would have meant the scheme would have taken up more than a year's supply of Mourne granite. However, I have asked that these matters be further considered, in the context of recession, local employment and relevant issues.

Surplus Land

Dr A McDonnell asked the Minister for Social Development to detail any (i) land; and (ii) property owned by his Department which is currently deemed surplus to requirements, including the location of the land or property and any plans for its disposal.

(AQW 779/11)

Minister for Social Development: Details of the (i) land and (ii) property owned by the Department for Social Development which is deemed surplus to requirements is provided below together with details of the current plans for its disposal:-

Land:

- (i) The table below identifies land that was vested under the New Towns Act (1965) for the development of the new towns of Antrim, Ballymena and Craigavon which are deemed surplus. These sites are included within a disposal Programme to ensure their disposal without undue delay and at the best achievable price.

Antrim Sites	Ballymena Sites	Craigavon Sites
Location	Location	Location
Niblock Road	Ballykeel House	M1, M12 Motorway, Portadown
Stiles Way, St Malachy's	Ballee Road West	22 Carbet Road, Portadown
Birch Hill Road	Ballee Road West	Carbet Road, Portadown
Birch Hill Road	Toome Road	Kilvergan Road, Lurgan
Birch Hill Road	Graveyard at Toome Road	Drumnagoon Road, Portadown
Stiles Way	Grange Road, Dans Road	Drumnagoon Road, Portadown
58 New Lodge Road, Caulside	Tullygarley Road	Charlestown Road, Portadown
4 Ballycraigy Road	Ballee Road East	Lisniskey, Portadown
Muckamore	Wyncroft, 18 Antrim Road	Kernan, Portadown
Riverside Walkway	Larne Link Road	Kernan, Portadown
Belfast Road, Oldstone Road		Knockmenagh, Portadown
Nursery Park, Belfast Road		Westacres, Craigavon
Belmont Road		Moyraverty, Craigavon

Antrim Sites	Ballymena Sites	Craigavon Sites
Location	Location	Location
Dublin Road		Moyraverty, Craigavon
Springfarm Road		Ardowen, Craigavon
Moylena Road		Tannaghmore North Road, Lurgan
Central Antrim		Ballynamony Lane, Lurgan
Rathenraw Estate		Carbet Road, Portadown
Cunningham Way		Drumgor Park
Cunningham Way, Belmont Road		Knockramer Park, Lurgan
		Rushmere
		Tarsan Lane, Portadown
		Kernan, Portadown
		Franklyn Park, Lurgan
		Derryvore Lane, Portadown
		Seagoe Road, Portadown
		10 Ballynamony Lane, Lurgan
		34 Ballynamoney Lane, Lurgan
		57 Carbet Road, Portadown
		Carbet Road, Portadown
		Seagoe Industrial Estate, Portadown
		Avondale, Craigavon
		Silverwood Business Park, Lurgan
		Peacefield, Ballinacor, Portadown
		55 Carbet Road, Portadown
		Tannaghmore West Road Lurgan
		Roundabout At Parkmore,
		Rathmore Craigavon
		Brownlow Craigavon
		Carbet Road Portadown
		M1, M12 Motorway, Portadown
		Carbet Road, Portadown

Antrim Sites	Ballymena Sites	Craigavon Sites
Location	Location	Location
		Oakfields
		Drumellan Craigavon
		Charlestown Road Portadown
		Rathmore Craigavon

Property:

(ii) Richmond Chambers, The Diamond, Derry BT48 6HN.

Land and Property Services within the Department of Finance and Personnel have been asked to advise on the disposal of this property.

Funding Allocated to Youth Work and Community Safety Work

Ms C Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) the funding allocated for this financial year by his Department to youth work and community safety work projects and groups in north Belfast, including groups based in the city centre; (ii) the groups receiving this funding; and (iii) the amount and duration of the funding.

(AQW 893/11)

Minister for Social Development: The table below contains all relevant information requested from DSD:

Organisation Name	Start Date	End Date	Total funding (£)	2010/2011 (£)	Area
Ardoyne Youth Providers Forum	01/09/2008	31/03/2011	123,482	49,538	Youth
Benview Community Centre	01/09/2008	31/03/2011	31,635	9,500	Youth
Carrick Hill Residents Assoc.	01/09/2008	31/03/2011	13,120	6,245	Youth
Cliftonville Community Regeneration Forum	01/09/2008	31/03/2011	11,692	4,177	Youth
Ligoniel Improve Association	01/09/2008	31/03/2011	25,282	10,068	Youth
Manor St/Cliftonville Comm Centre	01/09/2008	31/03/2011	46,484	18,408	Youth
Mount Vernon Community Development Forum	01/04/2009	31/03/2011	12,269	6,211	Youth
Star Neighbourhood Centre	01/09/2008	31/03/2011	21,319	8,512	Youth
Northern Ireland Alternatives (BRO)	01/07/2008	31/03/2011	188,782	70,377	Youth
			474,065	183,037	

Organisation Name	Start Date	End Date	Total funding (£)	2010/2011 (£)	Area
Ardoyne Association	01/09/2008	31/03/2011	3,356	1,327	Community Safety
Benview Community Centre	01/09/2008	31/03/2011	10,545	3,167	Community Safety
Ligoniel Improve Association	01/09/2008	31/03/2011	25,282	10,068	Community Safety
Marrowbone Community Association	01/09/2008	31/03/2011	8,038	3,179	Community Safety
North Belfast Senior Citizen Forum	01/04/2009	31/03/2011	23,070	11,678	Community Safety
Westland Community Group	01/09/2008	31/03/2011	7,383	2,916	Community Safety
Community Restorative Justice Ireland	01/11/2009	31/03/2011	95,871	67,424	Community Safety
Wheatfield Action Project	01/11/2009	31/03/2011	976	487	Community Safety
			174,521	100,247	

The Housing Executive provides £37,750 in 2010/11 to Northern Ireland Alternatives. This funding includes provision of mediation and community support in North Belfast, North Down and the Greater Shankill. It is not possible to disaggregate the proportion of funding solely for North Belfast.

Mortgage Rescue Scheme

Ms A Lo asked the Minister for Social Development whether he will seek further bids to implement the Mortgage Rescue Scheme in light of the potential increase in repossessions due to the payment rate reduction under the Support for Mortgage Interest Scheme.

(AQW 971/11)

Minister for Social Development: I do not have the funding to allow me to launch the financial-rescue element of the scheme despite repeated bids for resources to launch a full blooded Scheme. I will, however, continue to argue for the Mortgage Rescue Scheme in subsequent monitoring rounds and am attempting to identify if there other ways to move forward.

In the interim, I have provided funding for Housing Rights Service to operate a pilot Mortgage Debt Advice Service to increase the level of advice for people experiencing difficulty making mortgage payments. This specialised service is preventing where possible, people here from becoming homeless as a consequence of housing related debt.

Alcohol Pricing

Ms A Lo asked the Minister for Social Development if he has any plans to introduce minimum alcohol pricing or a ban on below-cost alcohol sales in line with proposals from the Scottish Parliament.

(AQW 977/11)

Minister for Social Development: I am keen to ensure that licensing legislation makes a positive contribution to tackling alcohol misuse. I am currently consulting on introducing a power in licensing legislation to ban irresponsible promotions in pubs, supermarkets and other outlets.

I also wish to introduce further measures to target those retailers who sell alcohol cheaply in order to encourage higher footfall and therefore generate sales. My officials are scoping out proposals for minimum alcohol pricing and monitoring the Coalition Government's proposal to introduce legislation to ban below cost sales in England and Wales.

My predecessor, Margaret Ritchie, had been exploring with Dermot Ahern TD, Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the scope for harmonization in pricing interventions. I will meet shortly with Mr. Ahern to consider how this can be progressed.

Development Site at Foyle Street in Derry

Ms M Anderson asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 8526/08, since work did not commence as planned by early 2009 on the development site at Foyle Street in Derry, for an update on his Department's plans for the future of this site; and to detail the reasons for the delay. **(AQW 1030/11)**

Minister for Social Development: The selected developer for the Foyle Street site, Big Picture Developments Ltd, withdrew from the project in December 2009 stating that the challenges faced in relation to financing the scheme, the state of the apartment market in Derry and the speculative nature of the office space were insurmountable. Big Picture also advised the Department that Whitbread, the hotel operator secured for the scheme, no longer wished to be involved.

The site, which has been used by FP McCann Ltd as a site compound for the City Centre Public Realm scheme, is currently in the process of being vacated. It will now be landscaped to provide a shared space consisting of a small urban park together with 50 car parking spaces to address some of the demand for additional spaces in the city centre. The car parking spaces are expected to be in place by the end of October with the landscaping elements completed by 31 March 2011.

I am confident the member will acknowledge the major contribution of DSD to the development of the City centre; £8m on public realm schemes in Guildhall Square/Waterloo Place and Newmarket Street and Urban Development Grant assistance of some £850k for the Northern Counties building and Artillery Chambers. In addition to this, the Peace Bridge, at a cost of over £13m, is currently being constructed across the River Foyle with match funding being provided from DSD.

My Department alone put forward bids for further monies for Derry development in the 2011-2015 budget period. In total my Department has made bids of £68m capital from 2011/12 to 2014/15 for the North West area to cover Neighbourhood Renewal (£8m), Urban Development Grant and Public Realm schemes (£20m), the City of Culture (£8m) and implementation of the Regeneration Plan (£32m) which includes the regeneration of Fort George.

Internal Investigations

Ms C Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Social Development the number of investigations within his Department in which the PSNI are currently involved. **(AQW 1031/11)**

Minister for Social Development: There are currently 4 internal investigations within the Department in which the Police Service of Northern Ireland is involved. The cases relate to investigations involving staff within the Social Security Agency and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive.

Disciplinary Investigations in the Housing Executive

Ms C Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Social Development how many internal disciplinary investigations are currently underway in the Housing Executive. **(AQW 1032/11)**

Minister for Social Development: There are currently five internal disciplinary investigations underway within the Housing Executive.

Grant Application System

Mr R McCartney asked the Minister for Social Development (i) when the new grant application system will be operational; (ii) how far it is behind schedule; and (iii) what impact the delay is having on the allocation of grants.

(AQW 1036/11)

Minister for Social Development: The new grants management system was piloted and then implemented at the Housing Executive's Ballyclare office during 2009. The system was subsequently rolled out to the other grants outlets, commencing with the Belfast office which went live on 25 January 2010. All Housing Executive Grants offices are currently processing grants applications via the new system. In relation to (ii) the implementation culminated at the Derry office where the system went live on schedule on 26 July 2010.

In relation to (iii) the implementation of the new grants management system required extensive preparation. This had an unavoidable impact on the delivery of the Housing Executive's business programme as it caused about a month's downtime for each office for the migration of cases, training and implementation of the new system. However, the Housing Executive remains confident that the grant approval target will still be met.

European Union Funding

Dr A McDonnell asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) the community groups in South Belfast which have been in receipt of European Union funding through his Department; (ii) the amounts they have received since 1998; and (iii) the community group posts including the number, job title and remit which have been funded.

(AQW 1041/11)

Minister for Social Development: My Department administered Funding to many recipients (some of which may have been community groups from South Belfast) under a number of 1994 – 99 European Union Programmes. However, due to the passage of time these programmes are long since closed. The branches involved have ceased operation and the relative records, files and documentation have either been put in to storage, or, no longer exist as they are now outside the required 10 year retention period.

In view of this I am not in a position to provide information for the years 1998/1999.

I can advise you that under the 2000 – 2006 Peace II and Building Sustainable Prosperity Programmes, a number of South Belfast projects did receive EU funding totalling £5,655,258.81.

Unfortunately, details on the community group posts including the number, job title and remit which have been funded are not readily available. It has also not been possible to identify and separate community group projects from the information available.

Housing Executive Contractors

Mr P Maskey asked the Minister for Social Development (i) how many inquiries are currently underway in the Housing Executive in relation to contractual arrangements between the Housing Executive and contractors; (ii) when these investigations will be completed; (iii) which contracts are subject to the investigations; and (iv) the areas to which they relate.

(AQW 1053/11)

Minister for Social Development: There are two inquiries currently underway in the Housing Executive in relation to contractual arrangements between the Housing Executive and contractors. I advised during my statement to the Assembly on 11 October that due process must be exhausted and these inquiries must be allowed to be fully completed. I cannot confirm when this will be but I hope this to be in the near future. In relation to (iii) I assume the Member is referring to Police investigations. These are not subject to police investigations. In relation to (iv) I assume the Member refers to work related areas which are electrical work and maintenance.

Care Packages for People with a Disability

Mr J Spratt asked the Minister for Social Development whether a person with a disability living in South Belfast will experience any change in a care package on moving to Lagan Valley, assuming there is no change in care needs.

(AQW 1059/11)

Minister for Social Development: In such instances where a change in housing or setting takes place, then a reassessment of the care package will be undertaken by the appropriate Trust team, taking into account, for example, the availability of additional support and access to locally based services. This reassessment may or may not lead to an adjustment of the Care Package.

Neighbourhood Renewal in the Kilcooley Estate, Bangor

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the next stage of neighbourhood renewal in the Kilcooley Estate, Bangor.

(AQW 1067/11)

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 which identifies the priorities up to 31 March 2011. The action plan will be reviewed again in the first half of 2011.

Small Pockets of Deprivation Funding

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the future of Small Pockets of Deprivation funding for the Rathgill Estate community workers.

(AQW 1069/11)

Minister for Social Development: The outcome of the Spending Review 2010 is not yet finalised. Plans for 2011/12 will be confirmed after the budget is agreed. I am strongly committed to the principle that people in areas of need should be protected going forward.

Community Houses

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how many community houses are currently being funded.

(AQW 1071/11)

Minister for Social Development: At present 340 Housing Executive properties are being used as community houses by community/voluntary groups.

Single Tender Actions

Mr M Brady asked the Minister for Social Development how many single tender actions were issued by his Department and its agencies, including the Housing Executive, in (i) 2005/06; (ii) 2006/07; (iii) 2007/08; (iv) 2008/09; and (v) 2009/10.

(AQW 1076/11)

Minister for Social Development: The table below details the number of single tender actions issued by this Department and its agencies in the years 2005/06 to 2009/10; detail pertaining to the Housing Executive is pending and will be provided at a later stage.

	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	£
Extension of contract awarded under full tender			1			20,000

	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	£
Linked to DWP Framework Agreement for JobCentrePlus			1			140,000
Linked to DWP contract under parity (IT) and DCLG Procurement Strategy contract				2	3	1,137,000
Specialist Advice/ System Supplier			1	4	1	253,819
General < £10,000	1		1	4	2	23,877
General £10,001 - £20,000	1		2	2	1	101,750
General £20,001 - £50,000			1	3	1	162,500
General £50,001 - £100,000	1		2		2	354,953
General > £100,000	1					136,000
Total	4	0	9	15	10	
Value (£)	209,900	0	401,124	648,832	1,070,043	

People with Disabilities

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Social Development what grants or funding schemes are available from his Department, or its arms-length bodies, to assist with projects undertaken by (i) groups for people with disabilities; or (ii) residential care facilities which cater for people with disabilities.

(AQW 1079/11)

Minister for Social Development: Under the Modernisation Fund, Voluntary and Community Unit has approved a Disability Action project to provide a centre of excellence in the North West. Based on the former Ebrington Barracks site, the aim of this project is to improve delivery of services and provide for the totality of the needs of people with disabilities and their carers in the North West. A similar service is already available through a Belfast based centre. The project does not incorporate a residential element. The application was supported by 11 partner organisations with the aim of creating a regional hub, bringing together a number of disability-related projects and service providers under one roof. A Contract for Funding worth approximately £1.275 million is expected to be issued when my Department has secured the required capital funding for this project.

While the Voluntary and Community Unit does not provide specific funding for groups serving people with disabilities, the Community Support Programme, which is run in partnership with all 26 local councils, does provide revenue funding to help local voluntary and community based organisations supporting those in greatest need. It is primarily a matter for the relevant local authority to decide on allocations and priorities across each local council area.

Furthermore, through their regional and sub-regional infrastructure and investment programmes, the Voluntary and Community Unit funds a number of network support organisations to provide generic advice and specialist services to the voluntary and community sector. Advice on issues such as fund raising, managing resources, recruiting volunteers and promoting local projects is available all across Northern Ireland through both regional and more locally based bodies.

The Housing Executive's Supporting People Programme also provides funding for persons with a disability. Table 1 attached details the services funded for persons with a disability at October 2010.

Client Group	Service Type	Number of Services	Contracted Units	2010/11 Budget*
Learning Disability	Accommodation Based Service	145	1250	12,348,184
	Accommodation based with floating/resettlement/outreach support	1	14	46,978
	Floating Support Service	5	102	419,342
	Total	151	1366	12,814,505
Mental Health Physical Impairment	Accommodation Based Service	113	1071	9,947,580
	Accommodation based with floating/resettlement/outreach support	1	4	33,712
	Floating Support Service	10	267	604,732
	Total	124	1342	10,586,024
Physical Impairment	Accommodation Based Service	20	199	1,268,850
	Floating Support Service	9	270	985,294
	Total	29	469	2,254,144
	Grand Total	304	3,177	25,654,673

Table 1 – Housing Executive's Supporting People Programme for persons with a disability

* As at October 2010

(Note: Figures rounded up to the nearest £.)

Financial Transactions

Ms C Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Social Development how much his Department spent on processing financial transactions in each of the three years prior to migration to Account NI.
(AQW 1090/11)

Minister for Social Development: The table below details the amount spent by this Department on processing financial transactions in each of the three years prior to migration to Account NI.

Cost Of Processing Financial Transactions £'000		
2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
820	859	849

It should be noted that, as a result of an arrangement in place from 1999 when the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and the Department for Social Development were established, this Department continued to process financial transactions for the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety up to the introduction of Account NI in 2008. The amounts quoted, therefore, include the cost of processing these transactions.

Homeless People Under 18 in Larne

Mr D Hilditch asked the Minister for Social Development how many people under 18 years old in Larne are currently registered with the Housing Executive as homeless.

(AQW 1106/11)

Minister for Social Development: One person under 18 years of age presented as homeless in Larne between April and September 2010 and was accepted as Full Duty Applicant status.

Childcare Provision

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) his Department's criteria for any funding of childcare provision; and (ii) how much his Department has invested in childcare provision in each of the last three years, including Sure Start programmes.

(AQW 1110/11)

Minister for Social Development:

- (i) My Department funds childcare provision through the Women's Centre Fund (WCCF) and the Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy. Both of these funding streams support childcare places in disadvantaged areas because of the absence of a coherent Northern Ireland Childcare Strategy. Eligibility for funding ultimately depends on the identification of need and the availability of other childcare provision in the area.
- (ii) Between 2007-08 and 2009-10 the amount that the Department has invested in childcare provision is approximately £1.89m through Neighbourhood Renewal and £2.42m through the Children and Young People's Fund (C&YPF) and Women's Centres Childcare Fund (WCCF).

To tackle this issue effectively and to increase the hope of impacting on child poverty we need Executive agreement to a coherent approach to childcare.

City of Culture 2013 in Derry

Mr R McCartney asked the Minister for Social Development whether he has identified any funding from his Department's budget to be allocated to the City of Culture 2013 in Derry; and if so, how much and for what specific purpose, projects or programmes in the City of Culture is this money intended.

(AQW 1142/11)

Minister for Social Development: To date my Department has provided £450k resource (along with the Office of First Minister and deputy First Minister) in this current year to help fund the successful bid that has seen Derry win the title of UK City of Culture. An additional £2.2m resource is expected to be required during the period 2011-2014.

I am not in a position to confirm the exact DSD budget for future years until the Executive agree a Budget. I can however provide you with my Department's bids for the coming years.

In total my Department has made bids of £68m capital from 2011/12 to 2014/15 for the North West area to cover Neighbourhood Renewal (£8m), Urban Development Grant and Public Realm schemes (£20m), the City of Culture (£8m) and implementation of the Regeneration Plan (£32m) which includes the regeneration of Fort George.

If budget allocations are confirmed, my Department would be in a position to develop projects across the built environment, public spaces, streetscapes, the riverfront, parks and green spaces. DSD was the only department of government which put in its budget bid, further monies for Derry development 2011-15, including being the only department that put in a bid of £8m for the City of Culture 2013.

My Department is also aware of a growing private sector interest in the City surrounding the success of the City of Culture bid and we will give due consideration to all projects whose progression will match the needs for the City of Culture and the wider DSD social agenda.

Housing Executive

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how many houses are currently in stock with the Housing Executive.

(AQW 1265/11)

Minister for Social Development: The total Housing Executive stock as at 30 September 2010 was 90,194.

Land Owned by Housing Executive

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how much land is currently owned by the Housing Executive.

(AQW 1266/11)

Minister for Social Development: In addition to land which the Housing Executive owns and maintains for its current stock, they have a further land schedule of approximately 344 hectares across 357 sites which may be suitable for development. Housing Executive land is disposed of in accordance with Managing Public Money Northern Ireland (MPMNI) procedures.

Pilot Faith Forum

Mr S Anderson asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 547/11, whether (i) the Churches Community Work Alliance; or (ii) the Voluntary and Community Unit in his Department raised any concerns regarding the community balance of the invitations to participate on the pilot Faith Forum.

(AQW 1291/11)

Minister for Social Development: Members of the Churches Community Work Alliance (Northern Ireland) (CCWA (NI)) and officials from the Voluntary Community Unit (VCU) of DSD worked closely together to identify suitable individuals with a proven track record in projects of specific relevance to the areas of policy responsibility of my Department. CCWA (NI) and VCU officials are of the opinion that the membership of the pilot forum represents a broad range of faith organisations, Christian and non-Christian, currently active in faith based community work. They recognise that the current membership of the pilot forum contains too few women, a lower than preferred involvement of members from rural communities and inadequate representation of young people. However, a decision to proceed was taken to avoid any further delays in the work of this innovative project.

I have asked the pilot forum to consider issues around membership as part of their work over the life of the pilot forum and make recommendations on securing an appropriate community balance in the membership of any future faith forum. In the meantime I have also asked the pilot forum to consider ways of widening their consultation and engagement with churches and faith based groups that have no or minimal experience of working with my Department.

Voluntary and Community Unit

Mr S Anderson asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 547/11, to list each church and faith based organisation that the Voluntary and Community Unit of his Department has engaged with in the last year and the nature of that engagement, with particular reference to its engagement with the (i) Free Presbyterian Church; (ii) Elim Pentecostal Church; (iii) Congregational Union of Ireland; (iv) Reformed Presbyterian Church; (v) Evangelical Presbyterian Church; (vi) Baptist Union of Ireland; and (vii) Church of Nazarene.

(AQW 1297/11)

Minister for Social Development: In pursuit of its policy objectives to support the regeneration and community development of our most deprived communities and serving the needs of the most disadvantaged and marginalised groups across Northern Ireland, officials from my Department have met and engaged with members and representatives from across very many church and faith groups. In particular the Voluntary and Community Unit (VCU) within DSD has, since 2006, maintained a Regional Infrastructure Programme contract with the Churches Community Work Alliance (Northern Ireland)

(CCWA (NI)), a body made up of members from across many Christian Churches and organisations. CCWA (NI) have been tasked with engaging with all Christian faith communities and groups across the faith sector to develop their interest and capacity to become involved in social action projects.

Officials from VCU have met regularly with the members of CCWA (NI) and have attended many events and regular meetings at which they engage with representatives from a very wide section of Christian Churches. While officials do not keep records of the particular individuals they engage with at such meetings, I am advised that members from the Church of Nazarene, Elim Pentecostal, Congregational and Baptist churches have all been involved with the work of CCWA (NI). In addition my officials have attended major faith-based conferences organised by organisations like 'CREED' and 'Care for the Family' at which they make contact with a large body of Christian delegates from a wide range of Churches involved and interested in faith-based social action.

Other than these contacts, during the last year there has been no formal programme of engagement between VCU officials and any individual church body or movement, except when requested by individual organisations or members as part of other meetings and initiatives.

Home Owners in Negative Equity

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister for Social Development what action he is taking to help home owners, in the Village area of Belfast who are facing (i) negative equity; and (ii) bankruptcy after their homes were vested by the Housing Executive.

(AQW 1306/11)

Minister for Social Development: I understand there are a number of property owners in the Village, home owners and investors alike, who may owe more on their property than it is currently valued by Land and Property Services within DFP.

This issue was recently considered by the Lands Tribunal for NI who ruled that the 'amount of compensation payable upon the vesting of mortgaged lands is not measured by the sum of money required to redeem the mortgage or mortgage upon the lands'. The Tribunal also ruled the Housing Executive was not 'bound to discharge all of the mortgaged debts secured on each property'.

Given the implications of this ruling, and the issues raised by the vesting of land and property by other Government Departments, for example by DRD for new Road Building, I have written to my Ministerial colleague, Sammy Wilson, Minister of Finance and Personnel, to identify what can be done.

I will be happy to keep the member apprised of any developments in that regard. I appreciate the difficulties that people are now facing and am actively considering this issue.

Red Sky Developments

Mr A Maskey asked the Minister for Social Development if he will make the Forensic investigation into contractual arrangements between Red Sky and the Housing Executive available to all West Belfast MLAs as soon as it is complete.

(AQW 1391/11)

Minister for Social Development: The Housing Executive commissioned a confidential investigation by external forensic consultants into the work being carried out by one of its contractors (Red Sky) in its West Belfast Districts. The final report of that investigation is likely to be received within the next few weeks. It is hoped that the findings of that report will enable the Housing Executive to carefully consider its contractual position under the contract and decide whether any further steps against the contractor or other parties will be necessary. Any such actions will necessarily involve the right of the affected parties to make representations to the Housing Executive on its findings before any further steps can be taken.

Accordingly, in the interests of due process, it would be inappropriate and premature to publicly release the findings of the report until appropriate steps have been taken by the Housing Executive or other bodies in relation to the report. I will, of course, share with the Social Development Committee, if

necessary in private and in confidence, such information that is proper to share, consistent with the standards outlined above.

Assignment of a Housing Executive tenancy

Mr C Lyttle asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the process for assignment by the courts of a Housing Executive tenancy from one tenant to another under Rule 76 of the Housing Selection Scheme.

(AQW 1393/11)

Minister for Social Development: Rule 76 of the Housing Selection Scheme states that the Housing Executive as a landlord will fully comply with its statutory obligations with regard to assignment. Under Article 32 of the Housing (Northern Ireland) Order 1993, an assignment may be made in pursuance of an order made under Article 26 of the Matrimonial Causes (Northern Ireland) Order 1978 or under Part 2 of Schedule 15, or paragraph 9 (2) or (3) of Schedule 17, to the Civil Partnership Act 2004. Where it is clear that a Court Order transferring a tenancy had been made, the Housing Executive will obtain a copy of the Order which will be placed on the tenant's file. Neither the Assignor nor the Assignee is required to complete an assignment form. The Housing Executive cannot refuse such an assignment, indeed from a legal perspective the Order transferring the tenancy takes effect automatically.

Red Sky Contractors

Mr P Maskey asked the Minister for Social Development whether any penalties have been imposed on Red Sky contractors throughout the period of their contract for repairs in West Belfast; and what was the total amount paid to Red Sky in relation to this contract in each of the last five years.

(AQW 1438/11)

Minister for Social Development: The Housing Executive has not imposed any penalties on Red Sky contractors throughout the period of their contract for repairs in West Belfast. The total amount paid by the Housing Executive to Red Sky in relation to this contract in each of the last five years is as follows:-

2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
Nil	£28,859.91	£917,192.44	£1,427,829.16	£1,724,504.71

Northern Ireland Assembly Commission

Outreach to Local School

Mr C McDevitt asked the Assembly Commission for an update on the Outreach to Local Schools programme.

(AQO 302/11)

The Representative of the Assembly Commission (Mr P Weir): In response, as part of the implementation of the Engagement Strategy and following an Education Service questionnaire completed by teachers between March and May 2010, a strategy for Education Outreach has been developed by the Education Service. The aim is to promote the work of the Assembly and to deliver education programmes within schools and to other alternative education programmes.

In May 2010, the Education Service embarked on a pilot of a new Outreach Programme to Primary and Post Primary schools. This involved schools from Newry, Fermanagh and Tyrone.

An outreach programme was also delivered to students of Nursing and Midwifery in Queen's University, Belfast and to young people in Hydebank Wood Young Offenders' Centre and Prison in June 2010.

The Education service has trialled the use of Video Conferencing as a cost-effective way of engaging with young people. In May and June 2010, Members had successful video conferences with pupils from Lurgan College and Lumen Christi College.

The Education Service has identified 41 post primary schools who have not participated in the Education Programme in Parliament Buildings since 2007. In September 2010 these schools were contacted and offered an outreach programme workshop. The workshops are planned to take place on Fridays as far as possible in order to maximise opportunities for Members to participate in schools within their local constituency. All Members have received information about this new initiative and will be contacted by the Education Service when a school in their constituency is taking part in an outreach programme. Since September 2010, 170 pupils from schools in North Antrim and Tyrone have taken part and bookings have been taken from a further three schools.

In addition, the Education service is seeking to develop links with existing partner schools across Northern Ireland. The hope is to organise 'Hub events' between schools and within communities focusing on ensuring that the event is a cross community one which maximises opportunities to foster good relations.

Parliament Buildings: Tours

Mrs D Kelly asked the Assembly Commission if there are any plans to continue the hourly tours of Parliament Buildings which were successful during recess.

(AQO 303/11)

The Representative of the Assembly Commission (Mr P Weir): In response, as part of a plan to open Parliament Buildings for public tours, the Events team offered tours to visitors without prior booking for a three week period in August and September 2010. The team worked closely with local tour companies to encourage visitors to avail of tours on a drop in basis. Tours were conducted hourly and more than 800 people took part, proving a huge success.

The Events team are now developing a business plan to open Parliament Buildings for hourly public tours during recess periods, with a proposal to launch in the Summer Recess period of 2011. The Events Office is also currently running a second trial which will look at extending this provision throughout the whole year. With effect from today, the Events team has set aside two specific slots at 10am and 3pm, running Monday to Friday, for public tours on a pre-arranged or drop-in basis. The trial will then be evaluated and the outcomes considered.

Assembly: Budget

Mr D McNarry asked the Assembly Commission to outline its total budget for both the Commission and the Secretariat in each of the last three years, including any underspend.

(AQO 307/11)

The Representative of the Assembly Commission (Mr P Ramsey): In response, the Assembly Commission's Request for Resources as set by the Main and Spring Supplementary Estimates is not split between "Commission" and "Secretariat" expenditure. The total Resources budget, including both Departmental Expenditure Limit (DEL) expenditure and Annually Managed Expenditure (AME), for each of the last three years was £44.7 million in 2007/08, £48.6 million in 2008/09 and £55.6 million in 2009/10. The underspend in each of these years was £3.6 million, £3.5 million and £4.7 million.

If you require any further details on the Commission's budget position for the past three years, please contact Mr Tony Logue, Head of the Commission Support and Compliance Unit on the number above to arrange a meeting with Finance Office staff.

Parliament Buildings: Smoking

Mr I McCrea asked the Assembly Commission what provision is in place for people smoking outside of Parliament Buildings to dispose of their cigarettes.

(AQO 308/11)

The Representative of the Assembly Commission (Mr S Neeson): Following the introduction of the Smoking Regulations in 2007, the Assembly Commission implemented a smoking policy in Parliament Buildings. As a consequence a smoking shelter was provided in the West internal courtyard for all building users.

Smoking is permitted within the confines of the smoking shelter only and not in any other location, internal or external, within the vicinity of the building. For this reason receptacles have not been provided outside of Parliament Buildings.

Within the Stormont Estate, smoking is still permitted in the area of the public park. This includes the lower car park serving Parliament Buildings and for that reason a receptacle has been provided at the External Search facility.

Parliament Buildings: Internet

Mr B McCrea asked the Assembly Commission how it intends to address the long-standing internet problems within the Assembly's IT system, in particular the sporadic access to the internet and emails which affects staff working in Parliament Buildings.

(AQO 309/11)

The Representative of the Assembly Commission (Rev Dr R Coulter): In response, the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission provides a fully featured, internally based, email system for use by Members, Party Support staff and Secretariat staff on Assembly business. This system has been designed with a high degree of availability. A Member can choose an alternative, internet based, email system.

The Assembly also operates a "Shared Service" arrangement with the NI Civil Service to ensure a secure connection to internet based resources. There has been an increasing demand for a large number of feature rich websites from all users of the internet connection within Parliament Buildings including:

- Members,
- Members' staff,
- Party support staff,
- Party staff,
- Secretariat staff and
- Guests to the building including journalists, NICS staff and visitors.

To ease the pressure on the internet connection and counteract the demand for live video streaming of Assembly related material from external websites such as Democracy Live and the Assembly's own website, the new TV distribution system streams video to PC equipment connected to the main NIA network as well as to TVs. It features audio and video recordings of Plenary, Committee meetings, local news programmes and current affairs programmes. The internal network is designed to handle this traffic and further use of this facility should reduce demand on the internet connection.

The Assembly Commission has also restricted access to a number of non essential websites and is investigating how to prioritise all traffic to ensure that external email sites such as Hotmail, Yahoo and Google Mail are accessible during busy periods. A number of technical measures are already in place to reduce the pressure on the internet connection by storing frequently requested web pages and files locally for use when another user requests the same page or file.

The Assembly Commission recognises that these are only short term measures and a project has been initiated to obtain a replacement, secure internet connection of sufficient capacity for exclusive use by the Assembly.

Assembly Committees: Documents

Mr D Kinahan asked Assembly Commission whether it has investigated the benefits of supplying Committee Members with electronic devices to read papers so they do not need to be printed.

(AQO 310/11)

The Representative of the Assembly Commission (Mr P Doherty): In response, the Assembly Commission recognises the benefits of supplying Committee Members with electronic devices to read Committee meeting papers and continues to consider ways in which to facilitate this.

The main initiative under consideration is the use of e-readers to enable Committee members to view Committee packs electronically in Committee meeting rooms. A pilot study on the use of e-reader technology within the Assembly was undertaken in 2009. While it was recognised that the use of e-readers had potential, there were a number of difficulties encountered with the then commercially available equipment. The Information Systems Office, on behalf of the Assembly Commission, continues to review technological advances in the emerging e-reader market, and is hopeful that an enhanced e-reader will become available which could be trialled at a later date.

The amount of paper used within the Assembly has been identified as one of the key areas to be addressed by the Sustainable Development Office, to assist in the reduction of the Assembly's environmental impact. The successful introduction of an effective, user friendly e-reader would significantly reduce the amount of paper used in Committee meeting packs.

The use of laptops to view papers during Committee meetings is also being considered. All the new Committee Rooms have the infrastructure necessary to support the use of laptops. However, their use is constrained by a number of practical and technical issues. The Information Systems Office is currently examining ways to facilitate the use of laptops and to identify other possible alternatives.

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.

Revised Written Answers

Education

Staff Employed in Central Administration

In Bound Volume 54, page WA172, replace the answer to question (AQW 8266/10) asked by Mr Givan with:

Tá tugtha le fios ag Príomhfheidhmeannaigh na mBord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne dom gur mar seo a leanas líonta na mball foirne atá fostaithe i riarachán lárnach agus as sin na líonta a bhfuil poist shealadacha acu nó a bhfuil arduithe céime sealadacha acu: I have been advised by the Chief Executives of the Education and Library Boards of the following numbers of staff employed in central administration and of these the numbers in temporary positions and temporary promotions:

Board Area	Staff Employed	Temporary Positions	Temporary Promotion Positions
BELB	¹ 166	29	4
NEELB	² 320	42	62
SELB	³ 243	40	70
SEELB	⁴ 177	26	57
WELB	⁵ 281	49	46

- 1 BELB figure includes staff in the Chief Executive's, Finance and Technical & Services Departments.
- 2 NEELB figure includes staff in the Finance, Administration and Chief Executive's Departments and those administrative and management staff in the Education Department.
- 3 SELB figure includes staff in the Chief Executive's, Financial Support Services, Human Resources, Support & Property Services Departments and the 5 Board Central Management Support Unit.
- 4 SEELB figure includes staff in the Chief Executive's, Administration and Finance Departments.
- 5 WELB figure includes staff in the Chief Executive's, Services, Finance Departments and admin support staff within Children & Young People's Services and Teaching, Learning, Curriculum & Youth Departments.

Environment

Planning Appeals Commission

In Bound Volume 56, page WA59, replace the answers to questions (AQW 748/11) asked by Mr Beggs and (AQW 749/11) asked by Ms Purvis with:

The Planning Service has referred a number of major planning applications to the Planning Appeals Commission (PAC) with a request that they hold public local inquiries. In addition, the PAC has received requests from individual applicants to conduct a hearing into Notices of Opinion that the Department has issued, under the Article 31 procedures.

A list of the current cases referred to the PAC is attached and lists the priority order that the Department considers should be afforded to the individual cases.

The final decision on the scheduling of the inquiry or hearing and the timescale for reporting back to the Minister is a matter for the PAC.

TABLE 1: LIST OF ARTICLE 31 CASES CURRENTLY WITH THE PLANNING APPEALS COMMISSION. PUBLIC INQUIRIES

Priority Order	Appl No	Applicant Name	Proposal	Referral to PAC	Comments
1	S/2009/1045/F	Sprucefield Centre Ltd	Phase 2 of Sprucefield Park comprising 49,434 sq m gross retail floorspace 1,580sq m for restaurant use with associated car parking, ancillary infrastructure, landscaping and site works.	December 2009.	Hearing rescheduled to commence on 5 October 2010.
2	Z/2008/2306	Belfast City Airport Ltd.	Proposed runway extension by 590m at North-East end of existing runway and retraction by 120m at South-West end of existing runway, associated landing lights and ancillary works	March 2010	Documents delivered to PAC 21/04/10

Priority Order	Appl No	Applicant Name	Proposal	Referral to PAC	Comments
3 Con-joined Inquiry	X/2004/1800 (2008/C004)	Belfast Office Properties Ltd	Extension to Ards Shopping Centre for an additional 293,342 sq.ft. gross floorspace with a multi storey car park, service areas, access and landscaping.	6/11/2008	Documents delivered to PAC: 11/02/2009
3 Con-joined Inquiry	X/2005/0653 (2008/C005)	Castlebawn Ltd	Shopping Centre and associated multi storey car park & landscaping.	6/11/08	Documents delivered to PAC: 11/02/2009
4	O/2009/0792	NIE	North – South Interconnector and new sub-station.	Minister has announced intention to hold a Public Inquiry.	To be referred on resolution of a number of technical issues.
Article 31 Hearings					
5	T/2007/0656	Rathbeg Estates Ltd	Distribution warehouse with associated car parking and landscaping.	Applicant requested hearing: 28/7/2009	Documents forwarded to PAC: 20/8/2009
6	S/2004/1757	Castle Glen	Retail Development McKinstry Road Lisburn	Applicant requested hearing: 8/8/2009	Documents forwarded to PAC: 8 /10/2009.
7	A/2004/1251	Mc Cormick Properties Plc	Six storey building for office and ancillary uses. River Foyle Londonderry.	Applicant requested hearing: 10/9/2009	Documents forwarded to PAC: 2/10/2009
8	Z/2006/2018	Santon Group Develop-ments	Superstore, carparking, access and servicing arrangements, landscaping and associated development works Castlereagh Road.	Applicant requested hearing 05/01/2010	Documents Forwarded to PAC: 08/04/2010

Priority Order	Appl No	Applicant Name	Proposal	Referral to PAC	Comments
9	S/2009/0627	Wildrose (Magheralave) Ltd	Food Superstore Magheralave Roa	Applicant requested hearing 13/04/2010	Documents to be forwarded in due course.
	F/1999/0465	Larne Marina	Waterfront leisure development: 200 berth marina, hotel, restaurant and associated facilities, 112 residential apartments, car parking and realignment of public promenade and landscaping.	Applicant requested Hearing: 12/12/2007	Documents not yet forwarded.
	J/2005/0125	Heron Bros Strabane	Retail Development Strabane	Applicant requested hearing: 4/11/2008	Documents forwarded to PAC: 17/2/2009.
	A/2004/0976	Tesco Stores	Proposed foodstore, car parking, landscaping, and access. Buncrana Road Londonderry	Applicant requested hearing: 18/7/2008.	Documents forwarded to PAC: 16/9/2008.
	Z/2003/0437	Brunswick (Cathedral Way) Ltd	Mixed-used development comprising retail units, offices, apartments a multi-storey carpark and underground servicing	Applicant requested hearing 19/04/10	
	N/1996/0138	Vico Properties	Superstore, retail warehousing, PFS, drive-in restaurant, associated road works and car parking.	Hearing requested 3/7/1998. Agreed to withdraw request if JR of N/2005/0288 is unsuccessful.	Papers assumed to have been sent at time of request as was procedure at that time.

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