

Written Answers to Questions

Official Report (Hansard)

Friday 10 June 2011

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Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 10 June 2011

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Staff Who Develop a Disability

Lord Morrow asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail, under the Disability Discrimination Act (NI) 1995, the support and enhancements that employers are required to provide for staff who develop a disability, including the assistance that must be offered in the workplace.

(AQW 135/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness (The First Minister and deputy First Minister): We would refer you to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland's Disability Code of Practice, Employment and Occupation (NIA 167/03) which came into effect on 13 June 2006. A copy of the Code can be found at:

<http://www.equalityni.org/archive/pdf/DisEmploymentCOP05F.pdf>

This Code of Practice deals with the duties under Part II of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 which is based on the principle that disabled people should not be discriminated against in employment or when seeking employment.

Northern Ireland Friends of Israel

Mr D McIlveen asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how much funding their Department has allocated to Northern Ireland Friends of Israel in each of the last three years.

(AQW 154/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: This organisation has not received any funding from OFMDFM.

External Consultants

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the cost to their Department of engaging external consultants in each financial year since May 2007.

(AQW 155/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The table below details the cost to OFMDFM of engaging external consultants in each financial year since May 2007. These figures include external consultancy incurred by the Department's Arms Length Bodies.

OFMDFM EXTERNAL CONSULTANCY EXPENDITURE

	2007/08 (£'000s)	2008/09 (£'000s)	2009/10 (£'000s)	2010/11* (£'000s)
Core Department	2,760	805	1,700	1,078
Arms Length Bodies	3,935	1,670	1,979	2,109

	2007/08 (£'000s)	2008/09 (£'000s)	2009/10 (£'000s)	2010/11* (£'000s)
Total	6,695	2,475	3,679	3,187

* 2010/11 External consultancy figures are draft at this stage pending the completion of the audit of OFMDFM and its Arms Length Bodies' Financial Statements.

Racial Equality Forum

Ms Lo asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the Racial Equality Forum.
(AQW 219/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Following a meeting of the Racial Equality Forum in November 2009, it was agreed that a Racial Equality Panel should be established to take forward the business of the wider Forum, with the Forum meeting once a year.

The Panel has now met on three occasions, most recently on 17 May, with the next meeting scheduled for 8 September. As a priority, the Panel is currently considering the revision of the Racial Equality Strategy 2005-2010 and members have submitted comments and amendments for discussion. It is anticipated that the Panel's work on the strategy will continue over the summer with a view to presenting a draft document to a meeting of the Racial Equality Forum for consideration in the autumn.

The Forum also agreed that a thematic sub-group should be established to consider immigration-related issues within the local context. This sub-group, chaired by the Law Centre (NI), has met on five occasions, most recently on 14 April. The Thematic Sub-Group on Migrant Workers, led by DEL, also continues its work.

Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration

Mr McDevitt asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether they intend to publish all the responses that were received on the consultation on the Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration.
(AQO 6/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We have agreed to forward the responses to the cross-party working group which we are establishing to take forward development of the Programme. We will provide responses to the OFMDFM Committee and we will publish all responses on the Department's website in due course.

We were heartened by the interest, effort and engagement of all those who took part in the consultation and we want to give the views of all those people due consideration as we look at how we will build on and strengthen the document.

Minister of Justice

Mr McMullan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what discussions they have had with other political parties in relation to the appointment of a Minister of Justice in May 2012.
(AQO 7/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: This issue was discussed with party leaders during a meeting prior to the running of d'Hondt.

Maze/Long Kesh Development Corporation

Mr Givan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what progress has been made in relation to the establishment of the Maze/Long Kesh Development Corporation.
(AQO 8/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Officials are currently finalising arrangements for a public appointments competition to secure both a Chair and members of the Maze/Long Kesh Development Corporation.

We intend that the Development Corporation will be in place later this year.

Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration

Mr Doherty asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister when the Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration will be finalised and published.

(AQO 9/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The five main political parties have agreed to appoint representatives to a working group that will seek consensus on issues that will enable the publication of a Cohesion, Sharing and Integration strategy.

This group will consider the consultation responses, and all departments will be asked for their input. All consultation responses will be shared with the working group as well as the OFMDFM Committee.

A road map that sets out the steps and timetable for the strategy and a robust action plan will be brought forward.

We anticipate that the strategy and action plan will be ready for the autumn and December respectively.

OFMDFM: Fraud

Mr Sheehan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what steps have been taken in response to the allegations of malpractice or fraud by some groups that are funded directly or indirectly by their Department.

(AQO 10/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Information received in relation to allegations of suspected fraud and irregularity regarding public funds and involving funded groups will result in the Department commissioning or being party to commissioning an investigation.

We have established an Oversight Group to manage and respond in a co-ordinated way to any ongoing investigations.

A dedicated official has also been allocated to report to this group which meets on a monthly basis.

Lessons learned from investigations into fraud and irregularity and recent audits are being applied to strengthen sponsorship control arrangements and minimise the risk of further irregularities occurring.

Maze/Long Kesh Development Corporation and Peace-building and Conflict Resolution Centre

Mr McCartney asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline any progress that has been made on the establishment of the Maze/Long Kesh Development Corporation and on the development of the Peace Building and Conflict Resolution facility.

(AQO 11/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: OFMDFM officials are currently finalising arrangements for a public appointments competition to secure both a Chair and members of the Maze/Long Kesh Development Corporation Board.

We intend that the Development Corporation will be in place later this year.

An application for around £18.2m (20m Euros) for the Peace Building and Conflict Resolution Centre was submitted on 14 January for PEACE III funding. We hope to have a positive decision on this funding by summer 2011.

Investment: Government Funding

Mr Brady asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the work of the Budget Review Group and whether it will continue its work during this Assembly term.

(AQO 12/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Budget Review Group made an important contribution to the process to develop the Budget 2011-15 and will continue to meet during this Assembly term.

The Budget Review Group's work will include exploring additional potential options for revenue raising to be taken forward in the medium to longer term. The Group will also take forward the Review of Arms Length Bodies so that recommendations can be made to the Executive.

Maze/Long Kesh Development Corporation

Mr Elliott asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what progress has been made in relation to the establishment of the Maze/Long Kesh Development Corporation.

(AQO 14/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: OFMDFM officials are currently finalising arrangements for a public appointments competition to secure both a Chair and members of the Maze/Long Kesh Development Corporation Board.

We intend that the Development Corporation will be in place later this year.

Northern Ireland Memorial Fund

Mr Nesbitt asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how many individual victims and survivors have applications for assistance pending with the Northern Ireland Memorial Fund.

(AQO 15/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: According to the latest figures supplied by the Northern Ireland Memorial Fund, there are currently 694 applications for grant assistance awaiting the issue of a letter of award from the Fund. There are a further 1,459 grant applications which have still to be formally assessed by the Fund.

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

External Consultants

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the cost to her Department of engaging external consultants in each financial year since May 2007.

(AQW 156/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): The costs incurred by the Department on engaging external consultants in the financial years since May 07 is as follows:-

Year	Total Spend
07/08	£480,121
08/09	£488,450
09/10	£404,050
10/11	£332,550

(may be subject to change after the DARD accounts have been audited)

Information on external consultancy services is recorded in accordance with DFP guidance issued in December 2009.

I am focused on further reducing the level of this Department's expenditure on external consultants and, in line with the action taken by my predecessor, it will continue to be a requirement for any plans to procure external consultants to be subject to my approval.

Botulism

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether there has been an increase in the number of reported cases of botulism over the last three years; and in which areas increases were recorded.

(AQW 196/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I will deal with questions 196/11-15, 197/11-15 and 198/11-15 together.

Botulism is a severe, often fatal form of food poisoning which can affect most animals. The bacteria that cause botulism are commonly found in the environment and the disease does not spread from animal to animal. I recognise that botulism in cattle can cause significant problems for farmers and treatment is rarely successful. It is therefore better to minimise the risk of the disease occurring, primarily through biosecurity measures and also through use of vaccine.

My Department has worked closely with the Agri-Food Biosciences Institute (AFBI) to develop advice to farmers on how to reduce the risk of botulism. This advice is publicised widely in DARD offices and on my Department's website. My Department's Veterinary Service will also arrange for public health advice to be given to farmers whose cattle are affected. While botulism in cattle is not known to have any human health implications, the Food Standards Agency (FSA) requests a voluntary restriction on milk and meat from affected cattle, sheep and goats entering the food chain.

The main source of the botulinum toxin is believed to be the carcasses of chicken that have become embedded in poultry litter. Direct or indirect contact by cattle with such litter can increase the risk of botulism in cattle. While the spreading of poultry litter on land is permitted by the Animal By-Products (Enforcement) Regulations (NI) 2011, the Regulations require that chicken carcasses must be disposed of by rendering in an approved processing plant or by incineration in an approved incinerator. Contaminated litter must not be applied to land and to do so is an offence.

Under the Nitrates Action Programme Regulations (NI) 2010, farmers are also required when storing poultry litter in field heaps to ensure that it is covered by an impermeable membrane within 24 hours of placing in the field. The field storage of poultry litter will be reviewed in September 2011 taking account of research into whether it has a detrimental impact on water quality.

No vaccine is available under general licence in Britain or the north of Ireland for protection against botulism. However, the Veterinary Medicines Directorate has approved two vaccines, which are available under "special treatment certification", to veterinary surgeons in the north of Ireland for the protection of cattle at risk of botulism.

As botulism is not a notifiable disease under the Diseases of Animals Order (1981), there is no requirement to report the disease to DARD. Therefore my Department does not hold information about the number of reported cases over the last three years or the on-going incidences of botulism in cattle.

The Agri Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI), which carries out testing of suspect botulism cases as part of its commercial testing service to farmers, has provided the following information about the number of suspect botulism cases submitted for testing over the last three years and the number of positive bovine cases identified:

Cases submitted for testing for botulism to AFBI by year.

Year	Submissions	Positive Results
2008	92	14
2009	88	14
2010	109	14

There has been no increase in the last three years of the number of positive cases recorded by AFBI. AFBI has stressed the need to exercise caution when determining trends based on these results due to reporting patterns.

My Department does not hold information about the prevalence of botulism in cattle in the north of Ireland. AFBI has advised that it is impossible to assess the prevalence of botulism here from the results of its testing service, as the information available reflects only the positive bovine cases identified as a result of voluntary submissions. The nature of the botulism toxin and relatively small dose required to kill bovines also means that definitive laboratory diagnosis is difficult. It is therefore not possible to make comparisons with other EU member states.

Botulism

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the prevalence of botulism in Northern Ireland cattle compared to that of other EU member states.
(AQW 197/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I refer you to the answer given in AQW 196/11-15.

Botulism

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the on-going incidences of botulism in cattle; and if she will make a statement on this matter.
(AQW 198/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I refer you to the answer given in AQW 196/11-15.

Tree Population in North Down

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development in which areas of North Down her Department is planning to increase the tree population.
(AQW 228/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department's Forest Service will continue to encourage an increase in woodland cover, primarily through its Woodland Grant Scheme which is funded through the Rural Development Programme 2007-2013. Targets to extend the area of woodland are published annually in the Forest Service business plan and the grant scheme is available to landowners throughout the north, including those in North Down.

Woodland creation in locations where tree planting seem particularly desirable will be encouraged and an indicative map showing these areas can be viewed on the Forest Service website at; http://www.dardni.gov.uk/forestservice/indicative_map_for_woodland_creation_2009.pdf.

Average Age of Farmers

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what initiatives her Department has adopted in the last twelve months to encourage a decrease in the average age of farmers.
(AQW 234/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: DARD is aware of the current age profile of farmers in the north and the high proportion of farmers who are aged over 55. Whilst DARD aims to provide support for all farmers, the Department will also continue to promote opportunities for younger farmers where it can.

A recent example of this is tranche 2 of the Farm Modernisation Programme where additional marks were awarded to applicants who were younger members of farm households. My predecessor also recently renewed the Department's funding to the Young Farmers Clubs asking them to focus their work in areas such as succession planning.

In addition, my Department has continued its work on bringing through the new generation of farmers. Over the last 12 months the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise, (CAFRE), has continued to offer a wide range of further and higher education courses in agriculture and related subjects. Courses are available from Level 2 (craft level) to Honours degree and in the 2010/11 academic year, 730 students from a CAFRE total of 1671 enrolments, enrolled on these programmes. The education programmes delivered by CAFRE combine practical farming skills, with theoretical knowledge and aim to prepare students for employment in the farming or ancillary agriculture industry.

Bovine Tuberculosis

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what action her Department has taken in the last twelve months to prevent the spread of Bovine Tuberculosis; and for her assessment of the effectiveness of (i) a badger cull; and (ii) a badger vaccination programme to prevent the spread of the disease.

(AQW 238/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department has continued to apply and enhance our EU Commission approved bovine tuberculosis (TB) eradication programme, which helps to safeguard our £1,000 million plus export-dependent livestock and livestock products industry. This eradication programme centres on the detection of diseased or high risk animals, the compulsory removal of these animals from their herd of origin to slaughter, and the restriction of movements of cattle from infected herds until they are tested clear.

Our programme has been successful in reducing the TB annual herd incidence from almost 10% in 2002 to 5.10% at 31 March 2011 with considerable progress being made in the past year. The number of reactors in 2010 at 6,400 was 22% lower than in 2009 and was the lowest since 1998. Also, the number of TB breakdown herds in 2010 at 1,150 was the lowest since 1996 when TB levels were on a rising trend.

My Department continues to enhance its TB eradication programme. Since the beginning of 2010 we remove as reactors those animals that give an inconclusive result to a second consecutive TB test (rather than a third test as before). Also in December 2010 we commenced to use DNA identity tags on reactors to help reduce the potential for animal substitution post-valuation to reduce the risk of fraud and further disease spread. We have also recently commissioned the Agri-food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) to conduct a scientific review of the way we use the gamma interferon blood test in the TB programme to make sure we are making best use of it. In addition, we have continued to improve the rigour of our TB testing process through improved communications with Private Veterinary Practitioners (PVPs) and developments in the PVP supervision system; and improving the rigour of our own delivery through monitoring Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).

Fieldwork for our TB Biosecurity Study, which is assessing what critical differences there are between TB breakdown and TB clear herds in a TB high incidence area in County Down, was progressed in 2010/11 and that exercise is nearing completion. The results from this Study will be available later this year and should add to our knowledge of TB risk factors and help inform new biosecurity advice for farmers.

TB is a complex and multi-factorial disease and the issue of badgers and bovine TB is similarly complex. We know there is a link between TB in badgers and TB in cattle. But we do not know the extent to which badgers contribute to the incidence of TB in cattle here. To date, research involving badger culling elsewhere presents a mixed picture of its cost benefit and effectiveness in reducing

disease levels in cattle and is not, in itself, a straightforward solution to the TB problem. Interventions to address the wildlife risk factors may include improving biosecurity, as well as more direct intervention such as vaccination of badgers, which may be the most feasible solution in the long-term. However, I appreciate it may be some time yet before a viable oral vaccine for badgers can be deployed in a cost effective way.

As the badger is a protected species, any direct interventions in the badger population here would be subject to the agreement of the Environment Minister; the issue of appropriate licences; and the availability of the substantial additional funding that would be needed.

It is also important that we do not duplicate the expensive research work that is ongoing in other areas, but that we can draw down the lessons from that work and also collaborate with others where appropriate. Therefore, we are closely tracking the developments in the south of Ireland and Britain in relation to badger vaccination research. We are also closely monitoring the development of badger cull proposals in England and Wales. I shall be very interested to see how their proposals evolve and are implemented; and whether they successfully withstand legal challenge.

A number of Literature Reviews were also commissioned in 2010 in relation to research on: cattle to cattle transmission of TB; badger to cattle transmission; cattle TB tests and effective deployment; TB tests in badgers; and badger vaccines. The results of these reviews will help to clarify the critical knowledge gaps we need to address, while avoiding duplication of the expensive scientific research work that is ongoing in other areas. Additional funding has been allocated in DARD's budget over the next four years, which will enable us to commission further TB and wildlife research and studies to provide a robust evidence base to guide the TB eradication strategy.

I am fully committed to eradicating TB and I will work towards this end.

Local Lamb Processing

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what action her Department has taken in the last twelve months to encourage an increase in the local lamb processing capacity.
(AQW 240/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Any decision to increase lamb processing capacity is a commercial matter for processing companies and will be driven by an increase in demand.

DARD support to the processing sector is available in relation to capital investment, technical advice and skills development. The main funding instrument for agri-food companies is the Rural Development Programme (RDP), which includes the Processing and Marketing Grant (PMG) scheme. PMG funding is available for the construction of new premises, refurbishment of old premises and/or the purchase of new plant and equipment. Over the past twelve months the Department has committed funding of £2.9m to nine PMG projects and over the same period paid out grant of £2.52m against all approved projects across the Scheme.

In addition, the Livestock and Meat Commission (LMC), a DARD sponsored NDPB, provides a range of services to the beef and sheepmeat Industry, which includes the promotion of lamb. In the last 12 months, LMC:-

- carried out 220 beef/lamb cookery demonstrations, taking part in home economics classes in post primary schools across the north of Ireland.
- continued to support L'Agnean Presto, a promotional campaign highlighting the versatility of lamb in France - one of our key export markets.
- carried out a lamb promotional campaign on six radio stations across the north.
- undertook lamb retail sampling in three major multiple supermarkets across the north.

Botulism

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the number of cases of botulism in cattle recorded by her Department in each month since January 2010.

(AQW 244/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I will deal with questions 244/11-15, 247/11-15 and 248/11-15 together.

Botulism is a severe, often fatal form of food poisoning which can affect most animals. The bacteria that cause botulism are commonly found in the environment and the disease does not spread from animal to animal. As botulism is not a notifiable disease under the Diseases of Animals Order (1981), no statutory action is taken in cases or suspected cases of botulism and there is no requirement to report the disease to DARD. Therefore my Department does not record the number of cases of botulism in cattle.

I recognise that botulism in cattle can cause significant problems for farmers and treatment is rarely successful. It is therefore better to minimise the risk of the disease occurring, primarily through biosecurity measures and also through use of vaccine.

My Department has worked closely with the Agri-Food Biosciences Institute (AFBI) to develop advice to farmers on how to reduce the risk of botulism. This advice is publicised widely in DARD offices and on my Department's website. My Department's Veterinary Service will also arrange for public health advice to be given to farmers whose cattle are affected. While botulism in cattle is not known to have any human health implications, the Food Standards Agency (FSA) requests a voluntary restriction on milk and meat from affected cattle, sheep and goats entering the food chain.

The main source of the botulinum toxin is believed to be the carcasses of chicken that have become embedded in poultry litter. Direct or indirect contact by cattle with such litter can increase the risk of botulism in cattle. While the spreading of poultry litter on land is permitted by the Animal By-Products (Enforcement) Regulations (NI) 2011, the Regulations require that chicken carcasses must be disposed of by rendering in an approved processing plant or by incineration in an approved incinerator. Contaminated litter must not be applied to land and to do so is an offence.

Under the Nitrates Action Programme Regulations (NI) 2010, farmers are also required when storing poultry litter in field heaps to ensure that it is covered by an impermeable membrane within 24 hours of placing in the field. The field storage of poultry litter will be reviewed in September 2011 taking account of research into whether it has a detrimental impact on water quality.

AFBI operates a commercial testing service through which farmers may submit samples for post-mortem testing when botulism is suspected. AFBI has provided the following information about the number of positive bovine cases that have been identified each month since January 2010 through testing samples submitted by farmers:

Positive bovine cases identified through testing for botulism to AFBI by month since January 2010.

Month (2010)	Positive Results	Month (2011)	Positive Results
January	0	January	0
February	1	February	0
March	0	March	1
April	0	April	1
May	2		
June	1		
July	4		
August	1		

Month (2010)	Positive Results	Month (2011)	Positive Results
September	2		
October	2		
November	1		
December	0		

The toxin types isolated during 2010 were Type D (9 cases), Type C/D (5 cases). Type E and A were also detected (1 case). To date in 2011 both cases have been type D. The vast majority of bovine botulism is caused by either type D, or C/D. This has been the case for the period for which records are available.

Botulism

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what services her Department can provide to help farmers whose cattle have been affected by botulism and reduce the risk of the spread of the disease to other cattle.

(AQW 247/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I refer you to the answer given in AQW 244/11-15.

Botulism

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what is the strain of botulism currently affecting cattle; and whether it differs from any of the strains detected in the recent past.

(AQW 248/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I refer you to the answer given in AQW 244/11-15.

Building Sustainable Communities, Capacity Building Programme

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what steps she will take to ensure that the Building Sustainable Communities, Capacity Building Programme will be progressed.

(AQW 264/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: As you know, the previous Minister, Michelle Gildernew MP, MLA agreed that the original pilot scheme for Building Sustainable Communities in rural border areas should be extended, following an evaluation of the outcomes in 2009. Due to priorities being discussed at the time of Budget 2010, the new Programme was put on hold.

My officials are now assessing the Action Plans which were prepared some 2 years ago by the groups involved to ensure that the actions listed remain relevant, and are complementary to the other new, similar Programmes which have been developed in the interim. Additionally my officials are evaluating all aspects of rural community development through the means of an economic appraisal, and the Building Sustainable Communities Programme will be part of that.

I expect this work to take no more than 3-4 months, following which a new programme will be tendered.

Staff Sick Leave

Mr S Anderson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what steps her Department is taking to reduce the number of staff taking two or more periods of sick leave in a year.

(AQW 282/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department must apply the terms set out in the NI Civil Service Inefficiency Sickness Absence policy. This policy includes Review Points at which a sickness absence record must be examined. The NICS Review Points are 4 occasions or 10 working days in a rolling 12 month period.

In the case of probationers or those appointed on a fixed-term or temporary basis, each absence will prompt a review.

An electronic alert is issued to the line manager and to Departmental HR whenever a member of staff reaches the Review Point and inefficiency action, including written warnings and ultimately dismissal, may be initiated at that stage.

Single Farm Payments

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many people are still awaiting their Single Farm Payment; and what this figure represents as a percentage of the applicants.

(AQW 287/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department received 38,178 valid claims to the Single Farm Payment Scheme in the 2010 scheme year. Of these, 937, which represents around 2.5% of the total number received, had yet to be finalised, as at 2 June 2011. Not all of the remaining claims may be due a payment because of ineligibility or the application of penalties under scheme rules.

Common Agricultural Policy

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, given the significance of the forthcoming review of a new Common Agricultural Policy, what is her Department's definition of an 'active farmer'.

(AQW 289/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: For the purposes of administering the Single Farm Payment (SFP) Scheme, DARD is obliged to apply the definition of a farmer as detailed in EU Regulations. Currently, these Regulations do not refer to or define an 'active farmer'. The EU Commission is exploring ways in which SFP might be targeted to applicants who are undertaking some level of agricultural production while avoiding undermining the decoupled status of the SFP. One possibility that might be under consideration by the Commission is to link eligibility for SFP to the proportion of total income that an applicant receives from agricultural activity. That approach, of course, runs the risk of excluding certain part-time farmers, or farmers with other sources of income (such as pensions), from the SFP Scheme. Setting any level of production or income threshold as an eligibility condition always runs such a risk, as well as creating an additional administrative burden for claimants and administrators alike. That is why these matters need to be considered extremely carefully. Therefore, in its March 2011 submission to the EU Commission, DARD strongly urged that the use of an 'active farmer' requirement be left as an option for Member States and regions to apply if they considered it appropriate and feasible, with the Commission respecting the decision made by these Member States and regions. In other words, the issue of whether or not to apply an 'active farmer' requirement, and the nature of that requirement, should be debated and decided at a local level to suit local circumstances. This would be infinitely preferable to a mandatory EU-wide approach that ignores regional needs, lacks clarity, is difficult and costly to implement and which creates an exposure to EU audit criticism and sanction.

Video Image Analysis (VIA) System

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (i) for an update on the introduction of the video image analysis (VIA) system; (ii) whether there has been any notable disparity in grading in locations where VIA has been introduced compared to manual grading; (iii) were the producers paid the higher value on the occasions where carcass grades differed by VIA and manual grading; and (iv) if so, how many times did this occur and to what value.

(AQW 323/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: EU Regulations require all beef carcasses to be graded. The legislation permits this to be done manually or mechanically, but both human graders and machines must be licensed by the Department. Automated carcass classification (VIA) has been used by 7 meat processors in the north of Ireland since 28 March 2011. Following the switch over to automatic grading DARD Senior Technical Inspectors have been carrying out weekly unannounced checks on the machines and taking

whatever action is appropriate. The results of the monthly checks are published on the DARD website. The European Union Community Inspection Committee carried out an inspection on Beef Carcass Classification from 25 – 27 May 2011. The inspectors comprised 2 individuals from the European Commission and experts from 9 European Countries. The final report is expected to be available in the Autumn. The inspectors provided verbal indications that they found the standard of beef carcass classification using VIA to be satisfactory. They also indicated that they were content with the manner in which DARD carried out its checks.

It is early days in the use of VIA in the north. Based on information collated by the Livestock and Meat Commission the proportion of U grades dropped from 20.3% of the national kill in March 2011 to 12% in April 2011, since the introduction of VIA. The proportion of P grades increased from 6.2% to 11.8% during the same time period.

Where a machine fails to grade a carcass these will be classified by manual graders and the price paid is based on the manual grade. Each processor is required to have at least one licensed grader. When DARD checks are carried out both VIA and manual grades are available for the 40 - 80 carcasses which have been checked. This information is used by DARD to check if a machine is complying with the requirements of the Regulations. This information is not used by the factories to adjust prices either up or down.

The grade allocated by the VIA machine must not be changed. However, if a farmer wishes to appeal the price which has been paid the factory can adjust the price paid to producers. Consequently appeals are between the farmer and the factory. DARD does not hold information relating to this.

Fishing, River and Water and Marine Matters

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she would consider establishing a review committee to look at how best to co-ordinate fishing, river and water and marine matters within one Department.

(AQW 380/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I have no plans to establish a review committee. But should the Executive wish to examine the number and function of Departments at some time in the future this kind of issue would be considered in the round.

DARD Direct Office in Newtownards

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on the establishment of a DARD Direct Office in Newtownards.

(AQW 455/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: You will be aware that Newtownards is one of the 12 locations selected for a DARD Direct Office. The Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) has responsibility to provide office accommodation for NICS Departments. We have been working with DFP to identify, secure and develop office accommodation, which optimises alignment to the DARD Direct specification for each location.

Currently DFP is seeking to secure a property at Newtownards. If this is successful, I am hopeful the new office can be delivered within the next year.

Groceries Code Adjudicator Bill

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the proposed Groceries Code Adjudicator Bill and its potential impact on Northern Ireland.

(AQW 501/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: At the outset I want to make clear that the regulation of anti-competitive practice and agreements and the abuse of dominant position in the market are reserved matters. Nevertheless, I consider the publication of the Coalition Government's draft Groceries Code Adjudicator Bill to be an

important development which should benefit everyone in the food chain. In particular it should help ensure that farmers receive a fair price for their produce.

For many years producers and others in the supply chain have felt that the large retailers wielded too much power. To address their concerns a new strengthened and extended Groceries Supply Code of Practice was introduced in February 2010. This new Code requires retailers to improve their dealings with suppliers particularly on contractual terms, the keeping of records and the right of arbitration. However, although these changes are an improvement on the previous regime, the power that large grocery retailers have over their suppliers still creates pressures on some producers. In light of this it is clear that the Code would be more effective with an adjudicator in place to enforce it.

It is proposed in the Bill that the adjudicator should be able to act as arbitrator in disputes between retailers and suppliers; to carry out investigations of suspected breaches of the Code by retailers; to enforce the requirements of the Code; and to publish advice and guidance on aspects of the Code. In so doing the adjudicator will be able to protect the identity of those making a complaint and where appropriate to name and shame the retailers. I welcome this approach and the overall aim to ensure that fair trading practices pertain throughout the food supply chain. We want to see a food industry where farmers and food processors are getting a fair deal. This would be good for our agri-food industry and the north of Ireland's economy.

Agri-Food

Mr Brady asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether the agri-food industry has a key role to play in moving our economy out of recession.

(AQO 22/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I believe that the agri-food sector has a key economic role to play in building economic recovery. Not only is it one of the largest sectors, it has proven resilient in these difficult economic times, contributing almost £3 billion in sales and £1 billion per year in terms of gross value added, providing over 50,000 jobs across the supply chain. Indeed, a recent Northern Bank report backs this up by forecasting that the agriculture sector will have the second highest level of growth this year.

I want to see development that has a place for small producers and processors alongside the bigger players. One way we can do this is to ensure that research, technology transfer and skills are available to all. Investment in education, training and skills are crucial to developing a high growth agri-food sector, and my Department is at the forefront in this area.

My Department is committed to providing support for the sector's expansion and a joint strategy, 'Focus on Food' was launched in June 2010 setting out a shared government and industry vision for a productive, sustainable and competitive sector.

Underneath this overarching Strategy, my Department provides a wide range of support to the agri-food sector and I will continue to work with others to ensure a successful, sustainable and thriving industry.

In conclusion, Agriculture will be a key player in meeting the challenges of building economic recovery. Over this Assembly term I will work hard to widen our agri-food sector and to ensure its' position as a central contributor to the Executive's economic recovery plan.

Circuses: Wild Animals

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if she has any plans to introduce a ban on the use of wild animals in circuses.

(AQO 23/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My priorities on animal welfare over the coming period will be the roll-out of the new provisions in the Welfare of Animals Act 2011, including new subordinate legislation on the welfare of farmed animals, dog breeding establishments and the tail docking of dogs. Engaging with Councils as they prepare for their new enforcement role in relation to non-farmed animals is also a key priority. I am also fully committed to the roll-out of the Dogs Amendment Act 2011.

I would assure you that the Welfare of Animals Act 2011 provides a range of new powers to regulate any activity involving animals. In time, I would want to take advice on the legal implications and on the proportionality of all the options open to me, for example a ban or the introduction of a robust regulatory system so that the welfare of wild animals in circuses is fully protected. Before making any decision I would also want to examine developments in Britain, the south and Europe and also to engage with stakeholders, including circus operators, and their representatives, to ensure that their views are properly considered.

Bovine Technologies

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline her Department's strategy to eradicate bovine tuberculosis.

(AQO 24/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I am pleased that there has been considerable progress in reducing Bovine Tuberculosis (TB) incidence in cattle here, with the herd incidence almost halved from nearly 10% in 2002 to 5.10% at 31 March 2011. The number of reactors in 2010 at 6,400 was 22% lower than in 2009 and, indeed, was the lowest since 1998. Also, the number of TB herd breakdowns in 2010 at 1,150 was the lowest level since 1996 when TB levels were on a rising trend.

While these figures are encouraging, I know that TB is a very complex and challenging disease that is difficult to eradicate and I recognise the adverse impact TB has on those farms affected. I am fully committed to eradicating TB from cattle here and I will work towards this end.

We will continue to enhance DARD's TB eradication programme and its delivery. Securing approval each year from the EU Commission for our TB eradication programme will be vital in ensuring the continuation of our £1,000 million plus export-dependent livestock and livestock products industry. We will also look for more effective and efficient ways of reducing transmission of TB between cattle and between wildlife and cattle.

The fieldwork for our TB Biosecurity Study, which is assessing what differences there are between TB breakdown and TB clear herds in a TB high incidence area in County Down, is nearing completion. The results from this Study should add to our knowledge of TB risk factors and help inform better biosecurity advice for farmers. We are also reviewing the way we use the gamma interferon blood test in the TB eradication programme to ensure we are making the best use of it. We are closely tracking the developments in Britain and the south of Ireland in vaccination research and the consultation proposals in Britain for badger interventions so that we can draw down the lessons from that work and collaborate where appropriate.

The additional funding that has been allocated within the DARD budget over the next 4 years will enable us to commission TB and wildlife research and studies to provide a robust evidence base to guide our TB eradication strategy. A number of literature reviews are presently being conducted of existing and ongoing research in relation to cattle to cattle transmission of TB; badger to cattle transmission; cattle TB tests and effective deployment; TB tests in badgers; and badger vaccines. The results of these reviews will help identify the critical knowledge gaps we need to give priority to in the north of Ireland while avoiding duplication of expensive work that is ongoing in other areas.

Over the coming period I shall also want to discuss with industry stakeholders how we can continue to work towards TB eradication.

DARD: Headquarters

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the economic benefits of moving her Department's headquarters outside Belfast.

(AQO 25/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The proposed relocation of the DARD headquarters out of Greater Belfast has its origins in the Bain Report on the Relocation of Public Sector Jobs. As intimated in the Bain Report a move to a

rural location will have significant economic and social benefits and these will be fully articulated in the business case to be developed as part of the relocation project.

However, it is clear that the proposed relocation will stimulate the rural economy through increased local spending, provision of high quality and well paid public sector jobs and potentially jobs associated with the construction of and the ongoing servicing of a new building. It will also help to share wealth across the economy and contribute to better-balanced economic growth, by commencing to address disparities in the distribution of public sector jobs in the north of Ireland.

Furthermore, the proposed DARD headquarters relocation represents an important first step to relocate a significant share of public sector jobs and could pave the way for a much larger programme of relocation within the public sector, which would greatly enhance the economic and social development of our rural communities; bringing a greater realisation of the outcomes envisaged by Bain.

Woodland

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if her Department's commitment to double woodland cover will be included in the next Programme for Government.

(AQO 26/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I am committed to the Forest Service Strategy of doubling woodland cover in the long term. The Programme for Government has not as yet been finalised, but it is my intention that woodland creation targets are included.

Woodland expansion targets have been difficult to achieve in the recent past. From 2007/08 to 2009/10 we have seen a decline in the area of woodland created. This has been due to a number of factors, including the farmer definition within the Farm Woodland Premium Scheme. A number of applicants with approvals may have chosen to delay their commitment to woodland creation in the hope that the farmer definition criteria will be amended. We have received a negative response from the EU Commission on this issue and we will be advising woodland stakeholders.

We also believe that competition exists between the Woodland Grant Scheme and other Departmental land-based schemes, such as the Countryside Management Scheme, which can appear more attractive to farmers, and this presents a barrier to uptake of woodland schemes. This issue will be considered in the context of a review of Agri-environment programmes in consultation with Policy and Service Delivery Group colleagues.

During 2009, we increased Woodland grant Scheme grant rates to help achieve an increase in woodland creation. We are also taking a range of other actions to maximise woodland creation. This action includes contacting landowners with approval to plant woodland, but who have not yet submitted a claim, to encourage and support them to plant. We are promoting forestry grant schemes, and considering how best to integrate woodland creation with other Departmental land-based management schemes, for example Countryside Management Scheme, to achieve the priorities set for both agriculture and forestry. This work has resulted in a slight increase of 18% in new woodland creation during 2010/11 compared with the previous year.

Forest Service will continue to build on this increase by including a target in their Business Plan 2011/12 around an appropriate programme of work on how best to incentivise and promote woodland expansion.

Agri-Food

Mr Cree asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what specific measures she will take to assist the agri-food sector further.

(AQO 27/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I believe that the agri-food sector has a key economic role to play in building economic recovery. Not only is it one of the largest sectors, it has proven resilient in these difficult economic times, contributing almost £3 billion in sales and £1 billion per year in terms of gross value added,

providing over 50,000 jobs across the supply chain. Indeed, a recent Northern Bank report backs this up by forecasting that the agriculture sector will have the second highest level of growth this year.

I want to see development that has a place for small producers and processors alongside the bigger players. One way we can do this is to ensure that research, technology transfer and skills are available to all. Investment in education, training and skills are crucial to developing a high growth agri-food sector, and my Department is at the forefront in this area.

My Department is committed to providing support for the sector's expansion and a joint strategy, 'Focus on Food' was launched in June 2010 setting out a shared government and industry vision for a productive, sustainable and competitive sector.

Underneath this overarching Strategy, my Department provides a wide range of support to the agri-food sector and I will continue to work with others to ensure a successful, sustainable and thriving industry.

In conclusion, Agriculture will be a key player in meeting the challenges of building economic recovery. Over this Assembly term I will work hard to widen our agri-food sector and to ensure its' position as a central contributor to the Executive's economic recovery plan.

Single Farm Payments

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if she envisages significant changes to the Single Farm Payments Scheme as a result of the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy. **(AQO 28/11-15)**

Mrs O'Neill: There are several important issues that will be under discussion in the forthcoming CAP reform discussions that could have a significant impact on the Single Farm Payment Scheme.

The most important concerns the CAP budget, not only its overall size but its distribution to Member States, regions and farmers. I will be arguing very strongly that the CAP budget must be kept at as high a level of possible and that the share of SFP monies coming to the north of Ireland is maintained. As regards the distribution of these monies towards farmers, all the indications are that the EU Commission is determined to move away from historically based payments, but in order to minimise the impact on farmers, I will be seeking a long transition period.

Another issue is the possible environmental requirements expected from farmers in return for receiving these payments, which is referred to as 'greening' of the CAP. I can understand the desire of the Commission to improve the justification of CAP payments, but I will want to ensure that the measures suggested are justified, proportionate and avoid imposing significant additional costs and administrative burdens on farmers.

There is also a suggestion that the SFP should be restricted to 'active' farmers. While I am sympathetic to this concept, this is an issue that needs to be thought through very carefully as it could easily result in unintended and undesirable consequences, such as excluding some part-time farmers from support and imposing a heavy bureaucratic burden for all.

Finally, I would like to see a €100,000 cap on the total level of SFP receipts for any individual applicant. It is difficult to justify very large payments which simply undermine the credibility of the entire support regime.

In conclusion, I must point out that the CAP reform package has to be agreed by 27 EU Member States and the European Parliament and so it is not possible to be definitive about how the SFP scheme will change post 2013.

Chicken Litter

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether her Department has developed any plans for the disposal of chicken litter if the proposed incinerator at Glenavy does not get approval.

(AQO 29/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department has worked with the poultry sector over many years on the issue of disposal of poultry litter. Presently, the predominant disposal option employed by the industry is to land spread as a fertiliser. Poultry litter is also used in the production of mushroom compost and has been exported to Britain for incineration and energy production.

The spreading of poultry litter on land as a fertiliser is governed by the Nitrates Action Programme (NAP) Regulations which implement the EU Nitrates Directive. The NAP Regulations apply to all farms across the north of Ireland and include a limit on how much manure can be spread, when it can be spread and how it must be stored. The purpose of these controls is to prevent excess or inappropriate applications of manures which could result in losses of nitrogen and phosphorus to water and consequent water pollution. The NI Environment Agency is responsible for inspection and enforcement of the NAP Regulations.

The NAP Regulations effectively restrict the land available for spreading poultry litter and the poultry industry faces the challenge of finding sustainable land for spreading. Therefore, the poultry industry has brought forward the Rose Energy incinerator proposal as an alternative to land spreading.

Last year, my Department, the Department of Environment and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment established a working group with representatives of the poultry industry to investigate any viable interim options for low cost temporary storage measures and use of poultry litter pending the establishment of a sustainable long-term technical alternative to land spreading.

The working group has actively investigated a range of options including alternative treatment systems available in Britain, the south of Ireland and further afield. Conclusions of this work to date indicate that most potential options are either not available due to lack of capacity or are cost prohibitive.

DARD will continue to work closely with the poultry industry and provide advisory and technical support to help the sector comply with NAP requirements. In conjunction with the Agri Food and Biosciences Institute, we monitor the development of emerging technology and methods for disposal of poultry litter on an ongoing basis. Industry efforts continue to secure environmentally sustainable and viable ways to manage poultry litter and reduce reliance on land spreading.

Bovine Tuberculosis

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what action she intends to take to reduce the incidence of bovine tuberculosis on farms.

(AQO 30/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I am pleased that there has been considerable progress in reducing Bovine Tuberculosis (TB) incidence in cattle here, with the herd incidence almost halved from nearly 10% in 2002 to 5.10% at 31 March 2011. The number of reactors in 2010 at 6,400 was 22% lower than in 2009 and, indeed, was the lowest since 1998. Also, the number of TB herd breakdowns in 2010 at 1,150 was the lowest level since 1996 when TB levels were on a rising trend.

While these figures are encouraging, I know that TB is a very complex and challenging disease that is difficult to eradicate and I recognise the adverse impact TB has on those farms affected. I am fully committed to eradicating TB from cattle here and I will work towards this end.

We will continue to enhance DARD's TB eradication programme and its delivery. Securing approval each year from the EU Commission for our TB eradication programme will be vital in ensuring the continuation of our £1,000 million plus export-dependent livestock and livestock products industry. We will also look for more effective and efficient ways of reducing transmission of TB between cattle and between wildlife and cattle.

The fieldwork for our TB Biosecurity Study, which is assessing what differences there are between TB breakdown and TB clear herds in a TB high incidence area in County Down, is nearing completion. The results from this Study should add to our knowledge of TB risk factors and help inform better biosecurity advice for farmers. We are also reviewing the way we use the gamma interferon blood test in the TB eradication programme to ensure we are making the best use of it. We are closely tracking

the developments in Britain and the south of Ireland in vaccination research and the consultation proposals in Britain for badger interventions so that we can draw down the lessons from that work and collaborate where appropriate.

The additional funding that has been allocated within the DARD budget over the next 4 years will enable us to commission TB and wildlife research and studies to provide a robust evidence base to guide our TB eradication strategy. A number of literature reviews are presently being conducted of existing and ongoing research in relation to cattle to cattle transmission of TB; badger to cattle transmission; cattle TB tests and effective deployment; TB tests in badgers; and badger vaccines. The results of these reviews will help identify the critical knowledge gaps we need to give priority to in the north of Ireland while avoiding duplication of expensive work that is ongoing in other areas.

Over the coming period I shall also want to discuss with industry stakeholders how we can continue to work towards TB eradication.

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

Shared Culture

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what plans her Department has to promote a shared culture.

(AQW 191/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): I am committed to supporting efforts which promote and celebrate cultural diversity but also encourage respect for those with different cultural perspectives and traditions.

My Department funds a range of initiatives through the arts, libraries, sports, museums and the North South language body which provide scope for the community to find out about, explore and enjoy familiar cultural traditions and experience those which are different. Such programmes contribute positively towards building a shared and better future for all our people.

Shared Cultural Awareness

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for her assessment of the benefits of promoting shared cultural awareness in (i) Northern Ireland; and (ii) on an all Ireland basis.

(AQW 192/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Our recent history has emphasised the importance of working to create a shared and better future for all our people.

Helping people to explore difference, remove barriers and improve understanding contributes towards greater awareness of and respect for all our cultural traditions.

My Department sponsors a range of initiatives which promote cultural awareness, improved understanding and respect for all cultural traditions on the island of Ireland.

Shared Cultural Awareness

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for her assessment of whether cultural awareness is best promoted at a national or international level.

(AQW 193/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I want to build a society where people can live, work and socialise in safe and inclusive communities which understand and respect cultural differences.

Promoting cultural awareness helps to break down barriers between people from different traditions and counteracts stereotypic thinking. National and International initiatives demonstrate our rich and

diverse cultural heritage, global connections and the growing confidence of our communities. Exploring and celebrating our cultural offerings helps us to discover and share our stories and traditions with each other and with visitors.

Organisations Seeking Funding

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to list the organisations that have contacted her Department seeking funding since she came to office; and to list the organisations she has written to since taking up office.

(AQW 278/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Since my appointment as Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure the following organisations have contacted my Department seeking funding:

- Newry and Mourne Museum Committee
- Cycling Ulster
- COFLA Cardinal Tomas O'Fiaich Memorial Library and Archive
- Ballymurphy Massacre Committee Truth and Reconciliation.

And I have written to the following organisations:

- NILGA
- Special Olympics Ireland
- Belfast Deaf United
- Crescent Arts Centre
- Hands Around the World (London 2012 Inspire Mark)
- NI Champions(London 2012 Inspire Mark)
- Moyle District Council
- NICSSA

Arthur Cottage, Ballymena

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether her Department will help Ballymena Borough Council restore Arthur Cottage, Ballymena to its former status following the recent fire; and if she will work with the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to ensure that this happens as soon as possible.

(AQW 322/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My Department in financial terms is not in a position to assist Ballymena Borough Council in the restoration of Arthur Cottage following the recent tragic fire. I will consider each and every request for Departmental assistance as and when they are received.

Arthur Cottage, Ballymena

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what assistance her Department will give to Ballymena Borough Council to re-build Arthur Cottage, Ballymena following the recent fire.

(AQW 325/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: In financial terms my Department is not in a position to assist Ballymena Borough Council in the restoration of Arthur Cottage following the recent tragic fire.

Arthur Cottage, Ballymena

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what action her Department is taking to assist with the restoration of Arthur Cottage, Ballymena which was recently damaged by fire.

(AQW 326/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: In financial terms my Department is not in a position to assist in the restoration of Arthur Cottage following the recent tragic fire.

Fishing, River and Water and Marine Matters

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she would consider establishing a review committee to look at how best to co-ordinate fishing, river and water and marine matters within one Department.

(AQW 381/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am aware that responsibility for fishing, river and water and marine matters are spread across four Government Departments, namely Environment, Agriculture and Rural Development, Regional Development and Culture, Arts and Leisure. There are also a number of Government Agencies involved, including the Rivers Agency, the Loughs Agency and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency.

This matter has come under scrutiny before, with the Environmental Governance Review Panel producing a report in May 2007 entitled “Foundations for the Future” which made a series of recommendations on the management of the environment in Northern Ireland. The report commented that the responsibilities for the governance of the water environment are the most fragmented.

Some exploratory work has been carried out in relation to where responsibility for salmon and inland fisheries, which currently rests with my Department, may best lie in any new arrangements.

The position in relation to inland waterways is also fragmented, complex and somewhat confusing to the public.

I consider there is merit in building on the work that has already been done, but the manner in which this cross cutting matter is taken forward is an issue for the Executive.

DCAL: Arm's-length Bodies

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what progress has been made on a review of the numbers of arm's-length bodies of her Department.

(AQO 41/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: In November 2010, the Department initiated a review of its Arms Length Bodies. A two stage approach to this review was adopted. The aim of the first stage was to carry out a high level initial examination of the key issues in order to identify which Arms Length Bodies might be considered for a change in status or structure. This stage of the review has now been completed.

The second stage will then take forward those Arms Length Bodies identified in stage one as having the potential for change and examine the available options in more detail.

It is envisaged that the second stage will take longer to complete (possibly 12-18 months) and will include scope for consultation with both the Arms Length Bodies themselves and other stakeholders.

Clearly, in taking forward this further analysis, the Department will need to align closely with any work that the Budget Review Group undertakes in this area. My officials will therefore continue to liaise with colleagues in OFMDFM in progressing to the next phase.

Re-development of Windsor Park, Belfast

Mr Humphrey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure when the first tranche of funding will be available for the re-development of Windsor Park, Belfast.

(AQW 525/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Executive's endorsement, on 10 March 2011, of a stadium development funding package includes Government's contribution of around £25m towards the Irish Football Association's plans for the redevelopment Windsor Park, Belfast.

However, the position on when funding can be made available to the IFA (and the Governing Bodies of the other sports) is wholly dependent on the development of Project plans and the identification of associated timescales for each key element. The Department and Sport NI are actively engaged with the Governing Bodies of all the sports to urgently progress this and other aspects of project development.

Football

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she has made, or intends to make, any representations to the relevant authorities about people born in Northern Ireland playing football for the Republic of Ireland.

(AQW 576/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Good Friday Agreement provides for people from the North of Ireland to claim either Irish or British nationality. Under current FIFA rules, this in turn permits association football players from the region to choose whether they represent the Republic of Ireland or NI at international level. I am aware that previous Sports Ministers have written to FIFA on this matter and that the governing body for the sport here, the Irish Football Association (IFA), has appealed the ruling with both FIFA and the Court of Arbitration for Sport. On each occasion FIFA's ruling has been upheld. I do not, therefore, intend to make any further representations to the relevant authorities. Any change to this ruling would be a matter for the IFA, Football Association of Ireland and FIFA in the first instance.

Motorsport Infrastructure

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much funding has been allocated to improve motorsport infrastructure in each of the last four financial years.

(AQW 593/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Responsibility for improving motorsport infrastructure rests, in the first instance, with the organisers of motorsport events and the governing bodies of the sport. However, my Department, through Sport NI, has allocated funding to motorsport to help it bring about health and safety improvements at a number of venues across the North of Ireland. This funding has been made available via the 2&4 Wheel Motorsport Steering Group Limited which is the umbrella body for the four governing bodies of motorsport in the region. In the last four financial years Sport NI has allocated funding to capital projects within motorsport as follows:

Financial Year	Funding allocated
2007/08	£250,000
2008/09	£100,000
2009/10	£1,944,682
2010/11	£68,701
Total	£2,363,384

DCAL: Capital Budget 2011-15

Mr McLaughlin asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline her Department's capital budget for the 2011-15 period.

(AQO 39/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: DCAL has been allocated £158.2m capital budget for the period 2011-15.

The capital budget allocation for each year is as follows:

2011/12	£16.3m
2012/13	£34.7m
2013/14	£29.7m
2014/15	£77.5m

Allocations to sectors are as follows:

	Budget Allocation 2011 - 15 £m
Arts	5.31
Museums	4.27
Libraries	11.77
Sport	23.37
Major Regional Sport Stadiums	110.00
Inland Waterways and Inland Fisheries Group	4.18
N/S Body - Waterways Ireland	0.75
Public Record Office (NI)	0.78
Public Record Office (NI) - Receipts	-2.20
Total	158.23

Tollymore National Outdoor Centre

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much funding, in total, her Department has allocated to the Tollymore National Outdoor Centre since the opening of its new building.

(AQO 42/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Sport NI draft income and expenditure account to 31 May 2011 shows that my Department, through Sport NI, has allocated the following amounts to Tollymore National Outdoor Centre since its new building opened to the public in April 2010.

Resource: £744,885 (net of self-generated income)

Capital: £467,468

Non-cash Costs: £285,833

Libraries NI

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure when the Board of Libraries NI will be reappointed.

(AQO 43/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Libraries NI Board consists of 19 members, 11 of which are Councillors.

In accordance with their Terms & Conditions of Appointment the tenure of the Councillors on the Board ended at the date of the Council Elections on 5th May 2011.

It is my wish to reappoint those 9 Councillors who were successful at the May 2011 elections, and who may desire to remain on the Board, for a full period ending at the next Council elections. This is subject, of course, to them continuing to meet their Terms and Conditions of Appointment. My officials are currently preparing the necessary paperwork to complete this process. I wish to fill the remaining vacancies through the most appropriate and efficient process.

The 8 non Councillor members remain on the Board.

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Special Adviser

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, in light of the hurt caused to the Travers family by the appointment as a Special Adviser of a person duly convicted of the murder of Mary Travers, whether she will revoke the appointment and apologise.

(AQO 44/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am very conscious of the hurt experienced by all victims of the conflict, including the Travers family. The killing of Mary Travers was wrong and I regret very much that it happened.

I hope that this expression of regret will be accepted as genuine by her family. I am conscious of course that words will do little to lessen the grief suffered by the Travers family. The same applies to the families of all other victims.

The reality is that we live in a society emerging from conflict. And it is important to remember that there were many parties to this conflict including various armed groups, state forces, governments and individuals.

I do not accept that those who were once part of the conflict cannot be part of the building of a peaceful future.

Republicans have made an invaluable contribution to the construction of the peace process. Without their contribution we would not have a peace process. Mary McArdle has played an important role over the past 13 years in building support for this process.

I am therefore happy for Mary McArdle to continue in her position as my Special Adviser.

Multi-Sports Stadium

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether a multi-sports shared stadium is still a viable option.

(AQO 45/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Governing Bodies of association football, Gaelic Games and rugby were asked to come forward with options on stadium provision to meet their long-term strategic requirements. The outcome clearly indicated that they saw three separate and individually-tailored stadiums as the most practical and effective way as achieving this. The Executive subsequently agreed that we move forward on that basis.

As a consequence my Department and Sport NI worked closely with the three sports on developing stadium proposals. This culminated in the production of an Outline Business Case covering all three sports which has closely examined all the options, and variations of options, including ground sharing.

The completed Outline Business Case, identifying the preferred options for the sports i.e. three separate stadiums, has been approved by the Department of Finance and Personnel. In addition, on 10 March 2011, the Executive endorsed the proposal that the available funding of £110m secured in Budget 2010 should be used to take forward regional stadium development on this basis.

Department of Education

Inquiry into Successful Post-Primary Schools Serving Disadvantaged Communities

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Education what action his Department is taking in response to the findings of the Committee for Education's 'Inquiry into Successful Post-Primary Schools Serving Disadvantaged Communities'.

(AQW 164/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): My predecessor, in her response to the Assembly debate on the Committee's report (21 March 2011, Official Report Vol 63 No 6), set out the actions already being taken to address its findings. In particular, she noted that the Committee's findings supported the characteristics that make for a good school, as set out in the school improvement policy, a policy that will remain a priority for me.

I am familiar with the Committee's report, on which we worked together. I am therefore well placed to take account of its findings in continuing to implement the school improvement policy. I am mindful that the report was from the previous Assembly's mandate, but should the current Committee decide that it wishes to follow up on the report, I would be happy to provide it with a detailed response.

Co-ordinated Educational Planning

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Education to outline the extent to which there is co-ordinated educational planning between the divisions responsible for primary school provision and the provision of crèche and pre-school facilities.

(AQW 185/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The planning of pre-school and primary school provision is, in the first instance, the responsibility of the school managing authorities, who bring forward Development Proposals to shape or re-shape local provision for consideration by my Department.

All development proposals are considered in the context of the existing provision in the wider area, the Sustainable Schools Policy and any other relevant DE policy. The aim is to ensure that the proposals comply with DE policies and are viable and sustainable in the longer term. In addition, the views of the Education and Training Inspectorate and DE officials who have responsibility for policies which are directly linked to the proposal are sought and used in the decision making process.

When the Education and Skills Authority is established it will be responsible for the strategic planning of education provision on an area basis, including preschool and primary education.

Funding for Preparatory Schools

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the reasons why the results of the Equality Impact Assessment on funding for preparatory schools have not been published; and (ii) when they will be published.

(AQW 212/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I refer the Member to my answer to AQW 74/11-15 tabled by Anna Lo MLA, and published in the official report dated 3 June 2011.

Funding for Preparatory Schools

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education when all the consultation responses to the review of funding for preparatory schools will be published.

(AQW 213/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: During the consultation on the draft Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) over 400 responses were received. It has never been my Department's intention to publish all of the responses received during the EQIA consultation as to take forward an exercise to redact such a large quantity of information would be impracticable. The main focus throughout the EQIA process has been a detailed and thorough analysis of the responses received to ensure that all points of view have been examined, considered and documented. The findings of the analysis will then be published in both a qualitative and quantitative format.

My Department will shortly be writing to all those who participated in the consultation to advise of the EQIA's publication which will be available on the Department's website.

Nursery School Places

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of (i) fully-funded; and (ii) part-funded nursery school places that will be available in the Bangor area from September 2011.

(AQW 241/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: All pre-school places in statutory nursery schools or in nursery units in Primary Schools are fully funded by the Department of Education. There are 416 places in statutory nursery schools and nursery units in Primary schools in the Bangor area. 104 are F/T places and 312 are P/T places. These places will be available from September 2011. In addition pre-school places are available in settings in the voluntary/private sector, funded by DE.

For the 2010/2011 year a further 279 pre-school places are available in voluntary and private playgroup settings in the Bangor area. This number may increase for September but the exact numbers required are not available as the admissions process is not yet complete.

Physical Exercise: School Children

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education how many hours a week of physical exercise children get in (i) primary schools; and (ii) post-primary schools.

(AQW 251/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Physical education is a compulsory part of the revised curriculum for all pupils at every Key Stage (4-16 years old).

The legislation governing the revised curriculum prevents the Department from prescribing the amount of time to be allocated to any particular subject. The Department has, however, issued guidance to schools recommending a minimum of two hours of PE per week. This guidance is available on the Department's website, www.deni.gov.uk.

Staff Sick Leave

Mr S Anderson asked the Minister of Education what steps his Department is taking to reduce the number of staff taking two or more periods of sick leave in a year.

(AQW 283/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department manages sickness absence in line with the NICS Inefficiency Sickness Absence policy NICS Inefficiency Sickness Absence Policy. Review points for managing sickness absence are set out in the policy: 4 occasions or 10 working days in a rolling 12 month period for frequent short-term absence. In the case of probationers or those appointed on a fixed-term or temporary basis, each absence will prompt a review. My Department considers inefficiency action

whenever a review point is reached. Long-term sickness absence (defined as 20 working days or more) is managed through a series of review meetings and inefficiency action is considered as appropriate.

Lisanelly Shared Education Campus, Omagh

Mr P Maskey asked the Minister of Education what progress has been made on the proposed shared education campus at Lisanelly, Omagh.

(AQO 55/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: In April this year the Lisanelly site transferred into the ownership of the Department of Education which represents a further step towards this project becoming a reality. Rarely do sites of this size become available so close to the centre of a major town. It offers Omagh the opportunity to lead the way in developing a new shared state-of-the-art campus capable of servicing the needs of all its young people for generations to come.

Exemplar designs have been produced which help bring the project to life and provide a better understanding of what a shared education campus might look like, what could be achieved and the facilities that could be provided to meet the needs of all young people in Omagh and surrounding areas. These designs have been the subject of extensive public consultation and feedback from the community has been very positive, particularly from the young people.

Currently the Outline Business Case is progressing and will include a short-list of options, a financial model and an organisational plan. While the current financial climate is challenging I am committed to progressing with full exploration of the potential of a shared education campus at Omagh.

Parkhall Integrated College, Antrim

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister of Education to outline progress on the application for a new build for Parkhall Integrated College, Antrim.

(AQO 51/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Parkhall Integrated College is a controlled, co-educational, post-primary school for the 1116 age group, operating on split sites in Antrim town and with a 2010/11 enrolment of 682. The school was granted conditional integrated status in September 2009.

The project for Parkhall was included in last year's Capital Review and assessed as being 'Fully Compliant'. It is one of 53 schemes remaining on the Department's Investment Delivery Plan. A revised Economic Appraisal was received by the Department in February 2011.

The Executive's Budget, however, highlights significant reductions in the capital resources for Education over the next four years, which will have a detrimental effect on the Department's ability to deliver a school building programme.

It is incumbent of the Department, particularly in a constrained financial climate, to consider how the available capital funds should be deployed in a strategic and prioritised basis to address the most pressing needs and to secure maximum educational benefits for children and young people.

This work will be a priority for me and my officials in the coming months.

High School, Ballynahinch

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Education for an update on his Department's plans for a new build for the High School Ballynahinch.

(AQO 52/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The High School, Ballynahinch is a controlled, co-educational, post-primary school for the 1116 age group.

In the Capital Review commissioned by my colleague, Caitríona Ruane, a question was raised over the longer term viability of this school given an enrolment of below 400 pupils which is considerably

less than the Sustainable Schools Policy minimum. It is one of the 53 schemes remaining on the Department's Investment Delivery Plan. The project is for a new replacement school on the existing school site.

The Executive's Budget, however, highlights significant reductions in the capital resources for Education over the next four years, which will have a detrimental effect on the Department's ability to deliver a school building programme.

It is incumbent of the Department, particularly in a constrained financial climate, to consider how the available capital funds should be deployed in a strategic and prioritised basis to address the most pressing needs and to secure maximum educational benefits for children and young people.

This work will be a priority for me and my officials in the coming months.

Parkhall Integrated College, Antrim

Mrs Lewis asked the Minister of Education for an update on the proposed new build for Parkhall Integrated College, Antrim

(AQO 53/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Parkhall Integrated College is a controlled, co-educational, post-primary school for the 1116 age group, operating on split sites in Antrim town and with a 2010/11 enrolment of 682. The school was granted conditional integrated status in September 2009.

The project for Parkhall was included in last year's Capital Review and assessed as being 'Fully Compliant'. It is one of 53 schemes remaining on the Department's Investment Delivery Plan. A revised Economic Appraisal was received by the Department in February 2011.

The Executive's Budget, however, highlights significant reductions in the capital resources for Education over the next four years, which will have a detrimental effect on the Department's ability to deliver a school building programme.

It is incumbent of the Department, particularly in a constrained financial climate, to consider how the available capital funds should be deployed in a strategic and prioritised basis to address the most pressing needs and to secure maximum educational benefits for children and young people.

This work will be a priority for me and my officials in the coming months.

Education: Review of Public Administration

Mr G Kelly asked the Minister of Education what progress has been made on the reform of public administration within the education sector.

(AQO 54/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The case for reform within Education remains as strong as ever, and I am confident that the need for early progress is recognised on all sides of the house.

It is timely to reflect on why reform is so important.

The RPA is not about the needs of organisations; it is about giving all children and young people the educational opportunity that they deserve.

We have many excellent schools, but we also have too many that are not viable or sustainable.

Our education system produces some outstanding exam results each year, but too many children – some 42% - leave school without the qualifications for further education or employment.

Overall, our performance against international comparators is falling back, with serious implications for the economy.

The current administration arrangements are no longer fit for purpose, and cannot meet these challenges.

We now have an opportunity move forward and to bring about much needed reform.

Any new legislation would reflect the established fundamental principles of the Review of Public Administration. In preparing the Bill, my Department would also take account of the concerns raised by stakeholders.

I would like to be in a position to bring policy proposals to the Executive in the near future.

Primary Schools: Blythefield, Donegall Road and Fane Street

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of Education for an update on the amalgamation of Blythefield, Donegall Road and Fane Street Primary Schools, Belfast.

(AQO 57/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Belfast Education and Library Board (BELB) has indicated that it is working on proposals for a new school to amalgamate these three schools, potentially in a new build primary school, but work is at an early stage of a lengthy process.

However, the Executive's Budget highlights significant reductions in the capital resources for Education over the next four years, which will have a detrimental effect on the Department's ability to deliver a school building programme.

It will therefore be important to consider how the limited capital funds available should be deployed in a strategic and prioritised basis to address the most pressing needs and to secure maximum educational benefits for children and young people. This work will be a priority for me and my officials in the coming months.

My officials have therefore asked the Board to consider the possibility of amalgamation in advance of any major capital investment.

Pre-school Places

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Education why his Department does not take into account the birth rate when planning for the number of pre-school places.

(AQO 58/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Education and Library Boards manage the Pre-schools admissions process on behalf of the Department. This is done taking into account a number of factors including historical pre-school pupil numbers, known demographic changes, and pre-school capacity in particular areas. Whilst the birth rate statistics are useful to provide overall figures, they are not sufficiently detailed to predict demand for pre-school places in any particular area.

There is no statistical data available which provides detailed information on the projected number of children which will be in their final pre-school year – those aged between 3 years 2 months and 4 years 2 months – each September in a particular area. In addition the non – compulsory nature of pre-school means it is also difficult to predict how many parents will choose to avail of the pre-school opportunity for their child.

Whilst considering the number of pre-school places likely to be required each year, the P1 number, which is collated as part of the annual School Census, is used as a proxy for the size of the pre-school cohort.

Schools Estate

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Education how he intends to make better use of the Schools Estate.
(AQO 60/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I am committed to ensuring enhanced use of schools premises. The department already promotes this through programmes such as Extended Schools, Full Service programmes and our key school improvement policy "Every School a Good School".

All schools should consider the potential benefits of their premises being made available for wider community use and local arrangements between the school and their community are already common practice.

A Working Group established by the previous Minister of Education presented a report to the department, which included a set of case studies and guidance. The report also included a series of recommendations to help inform policy and operations aimed at enhancing the wider community use of school premises.

I will wish to review this work and decide an appropriate way forward. In doing this, I will need to balance the advantages to the broader community against placing unnecessary cost or administrative burdens on schools.

Department for Employment and Learning

Staff Sick Leave

Mr S Anderson asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what steps his Department is taking to reduce the number of staff taking two or more periods of sick leave in a year.

(AQW 284/11-15)

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): The Department for Employment and Learning must apply the terms set out in the Northern Ireland Civil Service Inefficiency Sickness Absence policy. This policy includes Review Points i.e. points at which a sickness absence record must be reviewed and consideration given to taking inefficiency action.

The NICS Review Points are 4 occasions or 10 working days in a rolling 12 month period. In the case of probationers or those appointed on a fixed-term or temporary basis, each absence will prompt a review.

An electronic alert is issued to the line manager and to Departmental HR when a member of staff reaches the Review Point and inefficiency action, including Written Warnings and ultimately dismissal, may be initiated at that stage, depending on the full circumstances of the case.

Neighbourhood Renewal

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how much funding his Department allocated to Neighbourhood Renewal in each of the last three financial years.

(AQW 300/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Department for Employment and Learning does not fund any services, either fully or partly, under Neighbourhood Renewal. 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.

Tuition Fees

Mr Moutray asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what progress has been made in relation to the review of tuition fee levels.

(AQW 351/11-15)

Dr Farry: In March of this year, my Department published a consultation paper seeking views on five options in relation to higher education tuition fees and a range of other student funding issues. An Equality Impact Assessment was published with the consultation paper. The options set out in the

consultation document were informed by a number of key factors, including the report and update from the independent review of variable fees and student finance arrangements.

The consultation period closes on Friday 10 June. Decisions on the way forward will be taken only after I have had an opportunity to analyse and consider the responses received. However, I recognise the importance of ensuring that this work is concluded as quickly as possible so we can provide clarity for all of the key stakeholders.

My officials are aiming to provide the Assembly's Employment and Learning Committee with a high level summary of the responses before the start of summer recess, although this will depend on the volume and complexity of responses received.

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Agri-Food Sector

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what action her Department has taken in the last year to assist the agri-food sector.

(AQW 124/11-15)

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): Last year my Department, through Invest NI made 46 offers of Selective Financial Assistance to assist the Agri food sector. This totalled over £6m support leveraging £54m investment into the sector and generating 276 new jobs and safeguarding a further 1,214. The majority of these safeguarded jobs were due to a major £37m investment by O' Kane's/Moypark with Invest NI contributing £5m support.

In January 2011, I opened Linden Food's new £8m retail packing plant. Invest NI provided £497k of assistance to this project which will create 85 new jobs generating £1.6m in wages and salaries for the local economy. Sales at the company are projected to increase by a further £34m over the next 3 years. A further 230 offers of advisory support of approximately £2m were made in the last year towards marketing, management and innovation projects.

Invest NI's food sector marketing advisers achieved £13m of new business representing 380 new product listings for 100 companies. Invest NI also piloted a series of Northern Ireland company visits for 60 companies to TESCO, ASDA and Waitrose head offices in Great Britain to present Northern Ireland products directly to their HQ buyer teams.

A three year inward bound red meat mission programme was completed which saw almost 80 international red meat buyers visit NI, the vast majority for first time and an estimated new export business of £60m.

Last June, I together with the former DARD Minister Gildernew launched the Focus on Food growth strategy for the Agri food sector here, at Parliament Buildings. This strategy was prepared in collaboration with the Agri food sector and details the key performance targets and areas of action for the development for the sector. I also agreed the recommendations of an independent review of the delivery of this strategy.

I also launched the Short Term Employment Scheme in response to the economic downturn and specifically prioritised the food processing sector within that scheme to offer support for generating additional employment in the sector.

Visit by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II to the Republic of Ireland

Mr S Anderson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the potential tourism benefits for Northern Ireland of the recent visit by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II to the Republic of Ireland.

(AQW 150/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The recent visit by HM Queen Elizabeth II provided an excellent opportunity to showcase both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, to a huge audience of potential holidaymakers in Great Britain and across the globe. The visit, which has been hailed a huge success, will deliver spin-off benefits for tourism in Northern Ireland.

Tourism Ireland had an extensive promotional campaign in place in GB, our largest tourism market, during the Queen's visit, to maximise this opportunity. TV and radio advertisements aired on key channels, along with print media and online advertisements to coincide with the visit.

The Northern Ireland Tourist Board also encouraged visitors to the Republic of Ireland to visit Northern Ireland through its seasonal marketing campaign, including extensive advertising and promotional stands at Dublin Airport, seaports, key events and key tourist hotspots in Dublin city centre.

EU Legislation

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail, since May 2007, whether her Department has taken any different approaches to that of Great Britain when making regulations or implementing EU legislation; and to provide examples.

(AQW 180/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The information is not held centrally and could only be retrieved at disproportionate cost.

Mobile Phone Coverage in Rural Areas

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail any action she has taken to encourage network operators to improve mobile phone coverage in rural areas.

(AQW 190/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The telecoms sector in the UK is fully privatised and independently regulated. For many rural parts of Northern Ireland (NI) mobile phone coverage is limited and the investment model for the mobile network operators is unsustainable given low customer numbers. A similar situation exists across the whole of the UK but is more acute in Northern Ireland.

The importance of mobile communication services is recognised in DETI's recent consultation document which has been brought to the attention of a wide range of stakeholders including the mobile phone operators.

The NI Broadband Fund, which I launched in August 2008, seeks innovative solutions to the provision of broadband services including mobile services. The Fund was highlighted to mobile operators. There have been five calls for projects to date but unfortunately none of the main mobile operators took up this funding opportunity.

I also met with the Northern Ireland Director of OFCOM earlier this year and urged the Regulator to do more to address the deficit in mobile coverage in Northern Ireland. Furthermore in response to the recent OFCOM consultation on spectrum, DETI has highlighted that steps should be taken to ensure rural areas benefit fully from the next generation of mobile services and that the coverage obligation of 95% proposed under this consultation must translate into at least the same coverage regionally for Northern Ireland.

Bureaucratic Burden on Local Businesses

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what steps her Department has taken since May 2007 to reduce the bureaucratic burden on local businesses.

(AQW 221/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department oversees the Northern Ireland Better Regulation Strategy. The Strategy was reviewed and updated in 2007 and 2010. The Strategy commits all departments to carrying out regulatory impact assessments and ensuring that all regulation is necessary and proportionate. It is

overseen by an interdepartmental group of senior officials and by a Stakeholders Forum representing businesses, regulators and enforcers.

Travel and Subsistence Costs

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail, in tabular format, the travel and subsistence costs incurred by (i) the Minister (ii) the Special Adviser; and (iii) support staff on trips outside Northern Ireland since May 2007.

(AQW 222/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Travel and subsistence costs of trips outside Northern Ireland are provided in the table below:

COSTS FOR DETI MINISTER, SPECIAL ADVISER, SUPPORT STAFF

Annual Year	Travel & Subsistence £k
May 2007 – 31 March 2008	114,011
1 April 2008 – 31 March 2009	¹ 53,301
1 April 2009 – 31 March 2010	92,771
1 April 2010 – 31 March 2011	74,860

To disaggregate information on an individual basis would be available only at disproportionate cost to the Department.

1 Travel and subsistence costs do not include ROI or GB and would only be available at disproportionate cost.

Air Passenger Duty

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether her Department will be making a submission on behalf of the Executive to the Treasury consultation on Air Passenger Duty.

(AQW 269/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) is leading on the Northern Ireland response to the HM Treasury consultation as APD is a taxation issue. My officials have been working closely with counterparts in DFP to ensure the Executive puts a strong case to HM Treasury in respect of the impact of APD on Northern Ireland.

Farm Safety

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, in light of the increase in fatal accidents, what action her Department has taken to improve farm safety in the last year; and what help and advice is available from the Department.

(AQW 288/11-15)

Mrs Foster: In recognition of the high risk inherent in farming, the Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland (HSENI), has in the last year, continued to deliver a range of targeted interventions aimed at promoting farm safety to farmers, farming families and farm workers. In addition to a proactive farm safety inspection programme, HSENI has promoted farm safety in the media; has worked closely with agricultural colleges and schools and has participated in agricultural events such as the Balmoral Show. Of particular note has been the continuation of the very successful, “Be Aware Kids” campaign, aimed at eliminating child deaths resulting from farming activities. Added to this has been a new “Stay Farm Safe” campaign aimed at addressing the vulnerability of the older farmer, who makes up a disproportionate number of the deaths resulting from farming incidents. HSENI has also developed a range of information and advisory materials and services on farm safety, that includes a free farm safety mentoring service delivered by HSENI’s small business advisory service Health and Safety Works NI, a free phone HSENI helpline and a farm safety section on its website.

Household Electricity Bill

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how the average cost of a household electricity bill in Northern Ireland compares to the average bill in Great Britain.

(AQW 292/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The average household electricity bill in Northern Ireland during 2010 is estimated at £496 per annum. This is for a standard credit customer with annual consumption of 3,300kWh of electricity and includes VAT.

This compares with an average bill during 2010 in England and Wales of £431 per annum, and £457 per annum in Scotland for similar customers and annual usage.

Presbyterian Mutual Society Savers

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, in light of the financial package that has been agreed by the Executive and the UK Government, when the Presbyterian Mutual Society savers will receive repayments of their savings.

(AQW 299/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Presbyterian Mutual Society (in Administration) creditors and members voted overwhelmingly on 6 May to accept the Administrator's proposed Scheme of Arrangement ("the Scheme"). The 28 day statutory notice period to facilitate, among other things, any challenges to the scheme ended on 10 June 2011. Following this the Administrator will seek the Court's final agreement to the scheme, which will include the appointment of Joint Supervisors, Mr. Arthur Boyd and Mr. John Hansen.

During the 28 day notice period my officials and their legal team have been working with the Administrators' team to address the necessary legal and contractual issues that require to be satisfied in order for the £175 million commercial loan and the £50 million financial assistance agreement, which is government's contribution to the Mutual Access Fund, to be paid to the Joint Supervisors. A key aspect of this is that government is satisfied that adequate security is available within the assets of PMS to enable the loan to be repaid in the event of default. This work continues apace.

Subject to the satisfactory completion of this work the Joint Supervisors will then be in a position to begin making payments to creditor and members. They have indicated that they are aiming for an early July 2011 timeframe.

Staff Sick Leave

Mr S Anderson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what steps her Department is taking to reduce the number of staff taking two or more periods of sick leave in a year.

(AQW 334/11-15)

Mrs Foster: In managing absence my Department applies the terms set out in the Northern Ireland Civil Service Inefficiency Sickness Absence policy. This policy includes Review Points i.e. points at which a sickness absence record must be reviewed. The NICS Review Points are 4 occasions or 10 working days in a rolling 12 month period.

In the case of probationers or those appointed on a fixed-term or temporary basis, each absence will prompt a review. An electronic alert is issued to the line manager and to Departmental HR when a member of staff reaches the Review Point and inefficiency action, including Written Warnings and ultimately dismissal, may be initiated at that stage.

Arthur College, Ballymena

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether her Department will help Ballymena Borough Council restore Arthur College, Ballymena to its former status following the recent

fire; and if she will work with the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to ensure that this happens as soon as possible.

(AQW 342/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) understands that Arthur Cottage is fully insured and the council may well be able to restore the visitor attraction to its original state.

Arthur Cottage, Ballymena

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what action her Department intends to take to assist with the restoration of Arthur Cottage, Ballymena, which was damaged by a fire.

(AQW 346/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) understands that Arthur Cottage is fully insured and the council may well be able to restore the visitor attraction to its original state.

Foyle Cup and the Milk Cup Applications for Funding

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to explain the NI Tourist Board's decision to reject the Foyle Cup and the Milk Cup applications for funding.

(AQW 445/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) Events Fund was developed to support the draft DETI Tourism Strategy for Northern Ireland to 2020 in delivering increased visitors and spend to Northern Ireland.

The Foyle Cup and the Milk Cup applied to the new NITB funding scheme in February 2011. Unfortunately they did not score well across the ten key criteria to be eligible for funding. NITB took a holistic approach to scoring and events must score well in each criteria, and demonstrate how they met the criteria to be awarded points. The ten key criteria are; Product and Customer Fit, Visitor Numbers, Economic Impact, Media Impact, Event Viability and Management Experience, Capacity for Growth, NI Brand, Environmental Sustainability, Social Impact, and Universal Accessibility.

All applications were assessed using a scoring matrix. Each application was scored twice and a final score agreed between the two assessors. Those applications that raised concerns were marked again to ensure accuracy and fairness of their scores. For all applicants' only the information provided with the application form was scored against.

Legislation

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what legislation her Department intends to introduce in (i) 2011/12; and (ii) the following years of this mandate.

(AQW 490/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Policy proposals for primary legislation are currently being developed in relation to Gas (Common Arrangements); Credit Unions; and Industrial and Provident Societies. It is likely that legislation on these matters will be introduced during the 2011/2012 Assembly session.

Proposals for primary energy legislation and amendments to the Health and Safety at Work (Northern Ireland) Order 1978 are also being developed to be introduced later in the mandate.

In addition the Department will be working on subordinate legislation in respect of Tourism, Health & Safety at Work; Consumer Affairs and Energy. These are subject to consultation with the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment and, where appropriate, Executive agreement.

Further legislative proposals may be brought forward during 2011/12 and the following years of the mandate, as needed, to give effect to new, or changes to existing, policies.

Department of the Environment

Single Wind Turbine Planning Applications

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (i) the number of single wind turbine planning applications in the Omagh and Strabane District Council area that have been (a) submitted; (b) refused; and (c) approved in each of the last four years; and (ii) of those refused how many applicants were not offered an opportunity to meet with the local councils to ensure that a full consultation process had been undertaken.

(AQW 54/11-15)

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment):

- (i) The total number of planning applications for single wind turbines received between 2006 and 2010 in the Omagh and Strabane LGDs was 140. See table 1 below

TABLE 1:

(a) Applications received for single wind turbines, 2006 to 2010 (Omagh and Strabane LGDs)

	Omagh	Strabane
2006/07	8	2
2007/08	6	4
2008/09	12	8
2009/10	15	18
2010/11 (up to 31st Dec 2010 only)	26	41
Total	67	73

- (b) & (c) Between 2006 and 2010, 64 single wind turbine applications were approved and 9 refused. See table 2 below

TABLE 2: SINGLE WIND TURBINE APPLICATIONS DECIDED 2006 TO 2010 (OMAGH AND STRABANE LGDS)

	Omagh		Strabane	
	Approved	Refused	Approved	Refused
2006/07	6	1	1	0
2007/08	7	3	3	1
2008/09	8	0	10	0
2009/10	5	4	7	0
2010/11 (up to 31st. Dec 2010 only)	3	0	14	0
Total	29	8	35	1

- (ii) Local councils are at liberty to engage independently with applicants at any stage of the planning process. As part of the process councils can request that an application is deferred to facilitate further discussion / consideration. Of the 9 applications refused 6 were deferred to allow for office meetings, further information or further reconsideration by the Department.

Planning Permission

Mr McKay asked the Minister of the Environment what action he intends to take to assist people from rural areas who are seeking planning permission to build a home and reside in their local community. (AQW 65/11-15)

Mr Attwood: All proposals for planning permission to build a home will be assessed against the policy provisions of PPS 21 'Sustainable Development in the Countryside', other relevant planning policies, the development plan, and other material planning considerations.

I am currently considering this issue further.

Premises at Chapel Road, Mayobridge

Ms Ruane asked the Minister of the Environment what action his Department is taking to address the health and safety issues at the premises at Chapel Road, Mayobridge, which holds half a million tyres. (AQW 110/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The operator at Chapel Road, Mayobridge has a waste management licence which permits him to accept up to 7,000 tonnes of waste tyres at the site per year.

The licence includes a number of conditions to manage and control the safe storage, recycling and disposal of waste tyres. NIEA staff also regularly assess fire break separation, security and access and the operator's fire/emergency action plan. The Agency works closely with the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service and local Environmental Health Department.

NIEA has suspended the site licence on two recent occasions and retains a partial Suspension Notice on the site. The operator can continue to process tyres and is permitted to import 1 tyre for every 2 tyres leaving the site up to a maximum amount.

NIEA has entered into an agreement with the company to implement a remediation plan for the site. This agreement includes measures in relation to health and safety and importantly includes a plan to reduce the total number of tyres held on site. A fire safety plan has also been commissioned as well as additional security. The Health and Safety Executive has been informed and has visited the site under their remit.

Over the past 8 months the company has considerably reduced the number of tyres on the site and currently there are approximately 2,682 tonnes or about 321,840 tyres. The company is required to submit weekly data returns to NIEA stating the number of tyres remaining on the site. The agreement in place requires the company to reduce the tonnage to about 700 tonnes by August 2011. Should the site operator fail to meet this target then NIEA will implement more stringent regulatory action.

Improvements have been made to the site since October 2010 however it is recognised that further improvements are required. NIEA will continue to monitor the site on a regular basis to ensure these are introduced in accordance with the agreement.

NIEA believes that unauthorised storage of tyres has taken place and in line with our Enforcement and Prosecution Policy a case file has been sent to the Public Prosecution Service.

The Department has also taken enforcement action under planning legislation seeking the cessation of the importation of tyres onto the unauthorised part of the site and the removal of all tyres externally stored at the site.

The company has submitted a planning application including an Environmental Impact Statement to regularise the situation, seeking planning permission to develop a tyre recycling facility on the entire site. The Department is currently processing this application.

I am considering this issue generally.

Hilden Mill, Lisburn

Mr Craig asked the Minister of the Environment (i) for his Department's assessment of the cause of the fire at Hilden Mill, Lisburn; (ii) to detail the damage caused as a result of the fire; and (iii) for an update on the progress made in relation to the re-development of Hilden Mill since the fire.

(AQW 165/11-15)

- (i) **Mr Attwood:** I can confirm, that my Department has been advised by the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service, that the fire was caused by vandals who had entered the building, and set fire to plastic cables on the third floor.
- (ii) The fire has caused extensive damage to the top three floors, with a partial collapse of the roof. A structural crack has also appeared in the roof top water tank enclosure. I understand that a Building Control officer has carried out a visual assessment of the building along with the developer's architect, and the initial assessment is that the primary structure appears not to be compromised.
- (ii) NIEA officials have been in contact with the Developer's Architect Dawson Stelfox, who has contacted the owners, Galliard Homes, and provided them with an update on the condition of the structure. I understand that there may be some interest from other parties in acquiring part of the site. My officials are seeking to convene a meeting with interested parties, to discuss potential future uses for this historic and architecturally important site.

Red Squirrel Population

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment to outline his strategy to enhance the protection of, and increase in the red squirrel population.

(AQW 177/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The native Red Squirrel population in Northern Ireland is rapidly declining in numbers and distribution.

It is widely accepted that the presence and spread of the Grey Squirrel is the biggest threat to the conservation of the Red Squirrel across the UK and Ireland. This is primarily due to competition for food resources and the spread of disease.

My Department is working with Queen's University to develop a research project to determine the current infection status of squirrel pox in the local populations of Grey and Red Squirrels. A key objective of the project will be to identify the main route of transfer of the virus and suggest ways to limit opportunities for spread of the disease and how to best protect surviving populations of Red Squirrels.

The NIEA acts as chair of the Northern Ireland Squirrel Forum (NISF) working with the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development's Forest Service, many non-governmental organisations and volunteer groups to develop and deliver best practice in Red Squirrel conservation.

An All Ireland Species Action Plan for the Red Squirrel was published in 2008, which included several objectives for conserving the Red Squirrel. This document recommended culls of Grey Squirrels in areas close to Red Squirrel strongholds. This plan also recommended the creation of Red Squirrel Reserves which can be defended against the ingress of the Grey Squirrel. To date six of these areas have been identified in State owned forests and the NISF aims to direct resources to control Grey Squirrels around these areas.

Archaeological Planning Conditions

Ms Lo asked the Minister of the Environment, in light of the job losses at the Built Heritage department of the Northern Ireland Environment Agency to detail (i) what contingency plans are in place to ensure that archaeological planning conditions are monitored to ensure that they are adhered to by applicants and developers; and (ii) his Department's assessment of the impact of these job losses on the

monitoring and adherence to archaeological planning conditions, including the impact on the efficiency of the planning process.

(AQW 220/11-15)

- (i) **Mr Attwood:** Staff in the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) will monitor archaeological planning conditions to ensure that they are adhered to by applicants and developers.
- (ii) The external contract used to support this work expired on 31 May 2011. Arrangements are now being made to retender this work on a competitive basis and it is expected this process will be completed later this year. In the meantime NIEA staff will seek to maintain the efficiency of the planning process and this may require a significant reprioritisation of their work, over the summer period, at least, while NIEA puts in place a new contract based, provision.

Marine Bill

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment (i) if he can give an assurance on the delivery of a Marine Bill; and (ii) to detail the timescale for the delivery of the Bill.

(AQW 227/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I am fully committed to the delivery of a Marine Bill. I am conducting further discussions with officials and external groups during the next two weeks to identify if the draft Bill can be enhanced. I have circulated an Executive paper and shall confirm timescale shortly.

Planning Bill

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of the Environment when he intends to make the regulations that are required for the Planning Bill to become into operation.

(AQW 232/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I will make the regulations to bring the Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 into operation at a time and in circumstances to be agreed by the Executive and only after new governance arrangements for councils, along with a revised ethical standards regime, including a mandatory code of conduct for councillors are in place.

Listed Buildings

Mr Craig asked the Minister of the Environment which listed buildings he is currently reviewing.

(AQW 276/11-15)

Mr Attwood: My Department undertakes this function through the Northern Ireland Environment Agency. It has an ongoing programme of review (known as the Second Survey) and approximately 670 listed buildings are currently under consideration as part of this programme.

Planning Application

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the average time taken to process a planning application from start to finish.

(AQW 356/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The average processing times for the 2009/10 business year is contained within the Development Management Statistics Northern Ireland 2009/10 Annual Statistical Bulletin (April 2009 to March 2010) which is publically available on my Department's website.

The average number of weeks taken to process planning applications in the 2009/10 business year is set out in the table below:

Business Year	Major (average number of weeks)	Intermediate (average number of weeks)	Minor (average number of weeks)
2009/10	24	16	8

Average processing times for the 2010/11 business year will be published in July 2011. I intend to interrogate this information to identify how to accelerate processes.

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Royal Victoria Hospital: MRI Scans

Mr Moutray asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the current waiting time for reporting on an MRI scan at the Royal Victoria Hospital, Belfast.

(AQW 199/11-15)

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): The table below shows the reporting times for MRI scans during the month of March 2011 (the most recent month for which published data are available), at the Royal Victoria Hospital.

		Reporting Turnaround Time at Royal Victoria Hospital						
Diagnostic Test	Priority	0-2 days	3-7 days	8-14 days	15-21 days	22-28 days	28 days +	Total Test Reports
Magnetic Resonance Imaging	Urgent	48	8	0	0	1	2	59
	Routine	476	204	48	96	4	111	939
	Total	524	212	48	96	5	113	998

Source: Departmental Return DRTT

Royal Victoria Hospital: MRI Scans

Mr Moutray asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) whether there is a backlog of MRI scans to be read at the Royal Victoria Hospital, Belfast; (ii) how many scans are involved; and (iii) what steps are being taken to address any backlog.

(AQW 200/11-15)

Mr Poots: I can confirm that the Belfast Trust has advised me that the Royal Victoria Hospital, Belfast is currently working to clear a backlog of scans to be reported at the hospital

- (ii) There are 430 neuro-radiology scans remaining to be reported at the hospital. Of these, 252 scans are currently waiting more than 28 days to be reported on. These represent just over 2% of the total number of scans taken on the RVH site.
- (iii) The Royal Group of Hospitals has recruited two additional consultant neuro-radiologists. The first will take up post in June and the latter in October 2011. This will bring the total to five. In the interim the Trust has recruited a part-time locum consultant radiologist to assist in clearing the existing backlog.

Abortions

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of abortions which have been carried out in each Health and Social Care Trust area in each of the last five years; and the reasons for each abortion.

(AQW 203/11-15)

Mr Poots: The number of abortions carried out, in each Health and Social Care Trust, in each of the last five years is shown below.

HSC Trust	Number of Abortions				
	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
Belfast	22	26	22	*	11
Northern	23	15	23	16	*
South Eastern	23	23	20	22	21
Southern	*	*	16	16	23
Western	*	*	10	*	*
Northern Ireland Total	80	79	91	77	67

Source: Hospital Inpatient System (HIS)

* In line with the Office of National Statistics (ONS) guidance, appropriate cells have been masked to protect patient confidentiality.

Information on the reason for abortion is not collected centrally.

Ulster Hospital, Dundonald

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an assurance that the refurbishment works due to be carried out in the Ulster Hospital, Dundonald over the summer period will not have a detrimental effect on paediatric services.

(AQW 224/11-15)

Mr Poots: The provision of a safe and effective environment for patients and staff is important. The Trust has advised that from 1 July to 26 September 2011 it will operate with one Children's Inpatient Ward. The Children's Outpatients Department and the Rapid Response Unit will function as normal. During this period the Trust expects to provide a full medical and surgical service and to return to normal working configuration at the end of September 2011.

Ulster Hospital's Craig Ward

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an assurance that no staff from the Ulster Hospital's Craig Ward will be required to take unpaid leave during the impending refurbishment of the ward; and to detail any proposed changes to the staffing arrangements during the refurbishment period.

(AQW 225/11-15)

Mr Poots: Staffing and employment matters within the Ulster Hospital are the responsibility of the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust. The Trust has advised that staff have been offered the opportunity to take additional leave over the summer months in light of the fact that one ward will be closed. Staff have been fully involved in the process, which is voluntary; unpaid leave is only one of several options and many staff have responded in a positive way.

The enhanced provision of a safe and effective environment for patients and staff is important. The Trust expects to return to normal working configuration at the end of September 2011.

Electroencephalography (EEG) Machines

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many Electroencephalography (EEG) machines are in use across the Western Health and Social Care Trust; and whether his Department has any plans to increase this number.

(AQW 262/11-15)

Mr Poots: There are no Electroencephalography (EEG) machines currently in use across the Western Health and Social Care Trust. The Western Trust does, however, have plans to establish an EEG service in its area and is currently in negotiations with their local commissioner.

MRI Scans

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many MRI scans were performed in (i) 2008; (ii) 2009; and (iii) 2010.

(AQW 279/11-15)

Mr Poots:

	Year		
	2008	2009	2010
No. MRI Scans performed ^{1,2}	43,208	49,128	50,442

Source: HSC Trusts

- Figures provided by the Southern HSC Trust relate to the financial years 2008/09, 2009/10 and 2010/11.
- Data provided by the Western HSC Trust include activity undertaken by independent sector providers.

CT Scans

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many CT scans were carried out at the (i) Causeway Hospital; and (ii) Antrim Area Hospital in (a) 2008; (b) 2009; and (c) 2010.

(AQW 280/11-15)

Mr Poots: The table below shows the number of CT scans carried out at the Causeway and Antrim Area Hospitals in 2008, 2009 and 2010.

Hospital	Year		
	2008	2009	2010
Causeway	5,537	5,929	5,947
Antrim Area	10,180	10,150	9,267

Source: Northern HSC Trust

Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority Registration Fee

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he will consider reviewing the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority registration fee that dental practices must pay given that the fee is the same for large and small dental practices.

(AQW 285/11-15)

Mr Poots: From 1 April 2011 legislation provides for the regulation of all dental establishments delivering private dental care, including orthodontics. This legislation will provide assurance to the public, through regular inspection and monitoring by the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority that private dental treatment is delivered to a minimum standard.

The legislation provides for a fee for registration and thereafter an annual renewal fee.

I have no plans to review the registration fee, which is a one-off fee of £952. The registration process is broadly the same for a small practice as for a large practice. Thereafter the annual fee is £46 per practice chair.

Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority Legislation

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he will consider a review of the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority legislation, which came into force on 1 April 2011, which regulates every dental practice as an independent hospital.

(AQW 286/11-15)

Mr Poots: I have no plans to review legislation, which from 1 April 2011 provides for the regulation of all dental establishments delivering private dental care, including orthodontics.

The registration of private dental practices within the classification of “independent hospital” is a legislative mechanism to facilitate regulation of the sector, but does not mean that they are treated, in terms of regulation and inspection, as hospitals. They are regulated and inspected with respect to the minimum standards for dental services set by the Department.

This legislation will provide assurance to the public, through regular inspection and monitoring by the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority, that private dental treatment is delivered to a minimum standard.

S2 Certificate Arrangements

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 46/11-15, (i) whether the Northern Ireland Health Service bears the cost of S2 certificate treatments that are provided in Northern Ireland and that the local budget is not recompensed if and when payment is received by the Department of Work and Pensions; (ii) if so, for his assessment of the acceptability of this arrangement; and (iii) to detail the cost of S2 certificate treatments for the last three financial years.

(AQW 290/11-15)

Mr Poots: The S2 certificate is designed to cover patients for non-emergency elective treatments and is generally used for specialist treatments not provided for in a person's member state of origin. Such treatments are usually provided at large specialist centres and therefore Northern Ireland will rarely be the chosen destination within the UK. S2 reimbursement operates at member state i.e. UK, level – this operates in both directions therefore while the health service in Northern Ireland does not get reimbursed for those patients they treat under an S2 certificate, it is also the case that the health service here is not charged for any Northern Ireland resident treated in another EEA country under an S2 certificate. This system applies to all parts of the UK.

In response to part (iii) of your question; as indicated in my response to AQW 46/11/15, this information is held at UK level and is not broken down by individual country.

Health and Personal Social Services (Quality, Improvement and Regulation) (Northern Ireland) Order 2003

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he will review the Health and Personal Social Services (Quality, Improvement and Regulation) (Northern Ireland) Order 2003 to ensure an unnecessary regulatory burden is not placed on the dental profession.

(AQW 304/11-15)

Mr Poots: I have no plans to review the Health and Personal Social Services (Quality, Improvement and Regulation) (Northern Ireland) Order 2003.

I do not consider that the Regulations made under the Order to provide for the regulation of private dental practices, including orthodontics, from 1 April 2011 place an unnecessary burden on the dental profession. A practice, once registered, will be inspected by RQIA once per year, subject to there being no concerns about delivery of care and treatment.

Whilst private dental practices are being regulated within the classification of “independent hospital”, this is a legislative mechanism to facilitate regulation of the sector, but does not mean that they are treated, in terms of regulation and inspection, as hospitals. They are regulated and inspected with respect to the minimum standards for dental services set by the Department.

This legislation will provide assurance to the public, through regular inspection and monitoring by the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) that private dental treatment is delivered to a minimum standard.

Supporting Pupils with Medication Needs Guidance

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of whether the “Supporting Pupils with Medication Needs” guidance, which was published in 2008, is fit for purpose; and whether it takes into account the latest treatment regimes for chronic conditions in school-aged children.

(AQW 306/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and the Department of Education are content that the “Supporting Children with Medication Needs” guidance is fit for purpose.

The guidance, which was a joint collaboration between the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and the Department of Education, was developed to provide schools with assistance in drawing up policies on managing medication in schools and educational settings where teachers and staff are willing to assist in the administration of medication.

The onus is on parents to make the school aware that a child requires medication and for providing the principal with written medical evidence about the child’s treatment or condition or special care needed at school. The booklet contains basic information on medical conditions that most commonly cause concern in schools e.g. asthma, diabetes, anaphylaxis and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). The guidance does not, however, aim to provide detailed medical advice as it is important that the needs of children are assessed on an individual basis.

In February 2010, the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in partnership with the Department of Education developed further guidance entitled “The Management of Anaphylaxis in Educational Establishments”. This guidance augments the information contained in the “Supporting Pupils with Medication Needs” by outlining the specific roles and responsibilities of the school, the school meals service, parents and carers, pupils and the school health team.

Renal Unit at the Causeway Hospital, Coleraine

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the provision of a renal unit at the Causeway Hospital, Coleraine.

(AQW 320/11-15)

Mr Poots: The commissioning of health and social care services to meet the needs of the population of Northern Ireland is the responsibility of the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) working in close partnership with the Public Health Agency.

The HSCB has advised that work is currently underway to consider the regional demand for all forms of dialysis and its implications for future capacity planning. Such an approach will take into account the improved survival rates which occur when patients receive live kidney transplants.

Multiple Sclerosis Services in North Antrim

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline his Department's plans for the continued provision of Multiple Sclerosis services in North Antrim.

(AQW 321/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Northern Health and Social Care Trust is committed to sustaining the continued provision of Multiple Sclerosis services in North Antrim. As part of the Trust's needs assessment, focus groups have been set up together with the MS Society to ascertain the views of service users and their carers on respite provision. A paper is being prepared to present to the Commissioner to reflect these views and will be available in the near future.

Staff Sick Leave

Mr S Anderson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what steps his Department is taking to reduce the number of staff taking two or more periods of sick leave in a year.

(AQW 338/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department monitors sickness absence rates very closely in order to meet Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) targets in this area. This includes regular reviews of sickness absence records to identify multiple or frequent absences. These are then dealt with on a case by case basis and inefficiency action - including written warnings and ultimately dismissal - may be initiated at that stage if necessary.

Fire and Rescue Service

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why cars which are used in emergency situations by the Fire and Rescue Service and which operate at a high speed do not have recognised high visibility markings as is the case with other emergency vehicles.

(AQW 341/11-15)

Mr Poots: Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS) cars are white with distinctive (removable) blue flashing beacons and highly audible siren systems; new vehicles are also equipped with flashing headlights and blue flashing grill lights. However, these vehicles are also used for a wide range of other non-emergency purposes and NIFRS does not consider that permanent high visibility markings are necessary.

Community engagement by the NIFRS has indicated that people tend to identify such vehicles with the Fire and Rescue Service.

Minor Injuries Clinic at the Mid Ulster Hospital

Mr Molloy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many patients have presented at the Minor Injuries Clinic at the Mid Ulster Hospital since it was established in May 2010; and how many of these patients were able to receive the necessary treatment at the clinic.

(AQW 378/11-15)

Mr Poots: Between the 24th May 2010 (the date on which Mid-Ulster emergency care department was reconfigured from a consultant-led treatment service to a minor injury unit) and 31st April 2011, there were a total of 5,579 new and unplanned review attendances at Mid-Ulster Minor Injuries Unit, of which 4,940 patients 'received necessary treatment'. For the purpose of this question, 'received necessary treatment' has been defined as those patients who were not transferred to an alternative emergency care department.

Music Therapy Services

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he will review the withdrawal of funding for Music Therapy.

(AQW 379/11-15)

Mr Poots: I refer the honourable member to the answers I gave to recent Assembly Questions; AQW 26/11-15 and AQW 76/11-15.

Southern Cross Nursing Homes

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action his Department has taken to ensure that effective protection is in place for residents of Southern Cross Nursing Homes in the event that the company fails to survive.

(AQW 441/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department is monitoring developments carefully as Southern Cross works with its landlords and those with a stake in the business to put the company on a firm footing. My officials are in contact with counterparts in the Department of Health in England, Scotland and Wales to ascertain the latest position across the UK and are working closely with the Health and Social Care Board to determine any potential impact in NI and plan accordingly to ensure that the welfare of residents in Southern Cross homes is protected.

E. Coli

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what measures his Department has put in place to deal with the continuing spread of the mutant strain of E. coli which has caused the deaths of at least eighteen people across the world so far.

(AQW 453/11-15)

Mr Poots: The four UK countries already have well established arrangements in place to ensure early detection and prompt management of outbreaks of infectious disease. In Northern Ireland the Public Health Agency fulfils this function. These arrangements include close liaison with health protection authorities throughout the UK, Ireland, Europe and beyond.

In Northern Ireland the Chief Medical Officer wrote to the Health and Social Care bodies and all GPs and GP locums on 26 May to alert them to the outbreak of E. coli in Germany and the possibility of cases in people returning from Germany.

There have been no cases to date in Northern Ireland, and every case in Great Britain has been directly linked to Germany. There is no indication that affected food has been distributed in the UK, however the Food Standards Agency (FSA) is monitoring the situation closely.

The Public Health Agency has taken steps to raise public awareness and understanding and to address people's concerns.

The Public Health Agency, the FSA and the Health Protection Agency continue to work closely with the European Centre for Disease Control, the European Commission, other Government agencies and industry bodies to monitor the outbreak.

Music Therapy Services

Ms J McCann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is his Department's position on funding for music therapy services for children with special needs.

(AQW 454/11-15)

Mr Poots: I refer the Honourable Member to the answers I gave to recent Assembly Questions; AQW 26/11-15, AQW 76/11-15 and AQW 379/11-15.

Community Health Village, Banbridge

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when work will commence on the proposed community treatment and care centre and day care facility at the Community Health Village, Banbridge; and when the work will be completed.

(AQW 457/11-15)

Mr Poots: The business case for Banbridge Community Treatment and Care Centre and Day Care facility has not yet been approved. Until approval has been given, I cannot provide timescales for commencement and completion of this project.

Department of Justice

Prisoner Assessment Unit

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to detail the cost of the Prisoner Assessment Unit since it opened.

(AQW 97/11-15)

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): The Prisoner Assessment Unit (PAU) opened in 1994. It is not possible to distinguish accurate costs relating to the unit until 1 April 2004.

The annual costs of the unit from this date are as follows;

2004/05	£727,352
2005/06	£830,952
2006/07	£869,858
2007/08	£907,627
2008/09	£851,860
2009/10	£887,592
2010/11	£885,018

Historical Enquires Team

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Justice what steps he intends to take to ensure that the business between his Department and the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister is not compromised during any investigation by the Historical Enquires Team.

(AQW 134/11-15)

Mr Ford: I fully support the work of the Historical Enquiries Team (HET) which plays an important role in dealing with the legacy of the past and providing a measure of resolution for families.

HET is entirely independent and there is no political influence over decisions to investigate and prosecute individuals in any cases examined by HET. If there is evidence that implicates anyone, these matters are investigated and where sufficient evidence exists, people will be prosecuted. These matters are for the Public Prosecution Service and Chief Constable.

My Department will continue to work closely with the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister as with all other Departments on a wide range of issues.

Queen's Counsels

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Justice to detail the total annual amount paid to Queen's Counsels in each of the last five years; and, where available, a breakdown of the amount paid to individual Queen's Counsels.

(AQW 158/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission paid the following sums, inclusive of VAT, directly to Queen's Counsel between 2006/07 and 2010/11:

2006/07	£11,965,192
2007/08	£9,290,325
2008/09	£11,101,224
2009/10	£15,568,813
2010/11	£7,752,523
Total	£55,678,077

LEGAL AID DIRECT PAYMENTS TO QUEEN'S COUNSEL BY YEAR

TABLE 1: FINANCIAL YEARS 2006-07 TO 2009-10

Queen's Counsel	2006-07 £	2007-08 £	2008-09 £	2009-10 £	Grand Total £
1	531,448	706,099	1,235,222	972,410	3,445,179
2	786,919	516,233	410,144	1,196,867	2,910,163
3	684,250	331,052	887,633	923,411	2,826,346
4	497,876	295,646	465,439	1,461,399	2,720,360
5	861,404	252,425	649,647	707,713	2,471,189
6	565,910	762,101	547,942	386,124	2,262,077
7	452,531	538,424	511,741	699,700	2,202,396
8	647,559	252,905	431,747	862,709	2,194,920
9	222,133	131,265	834,145	771,930	1,959,473
10	582,143	842,387	382,259	36,800	1,843,589
11	136,549	315,928	464,479	702,755	1,619,711
12	283,211	764,650	333,176	139,226	1,520,263
13	647,524	196,783	283,473	326,890	1,454,670
14	362,500	400,402	141,572	547,647	1,452,121
15	219,639	178,570	365,415	665,438	1,429,062
16	470,420	148,914	433,896	87,806	1,141,036
17	0	440,625	281,265	391,949	1,113,839
18	245,447	187,186	352,595	237,171	1,022,399
19	234,888	123,537	112,913	539,347	1,010,685

Queen's Counsel	2006-07 £	2007-08 £	2008-09 £	2009-10 £	Grand Total £
20	73,643	97,223	272,159	550,895	993,920
21	372,106	80,437	237,991	258,227	948,761
22	441,216	416,169	27,593	37,256	922,234
23	491,743	316,733	9,088	42,550	860,114
24	156,043	342,500	133,706	227,801	860,050
25	344,034	60,295	59,517	109,325	573,171
26	47,944	0	0	503,420	551,364
27	263,032	81,515	80,941	96,637	522,125
28	17,674	30,911	19,523	392,169	460,277
29	0	30,170	41,019	363,318	434,507
30	368,553	6,874	11,132	0	386,559
31	362,314	0	940	0	363,254
32	13,899	60,728	128,153	89,447	292,227
33	103,707	16,256	134,963	32,883	287,809
34	43,105	14,620	36,221	147,254	241,200
35	64,674	14,895	72,633	75,103	227,305
36	67,454	0	158,691	0	226,145
37	16,981	35,062	44,238	87,456	183,737
38	18,849	100,169	20,670	28,585	168,273
39	0	0	0	166,302	166,302
40	0	35,361	101,907	25,408	162,676
41	5,405	23,853	50,639	70,626	150,523
42	0	0	0	147,331	147,331
43	0	0	0	147,238	147,238
44	50,296	41,016	31,267	0	122,579
45	0	7,784	70,398	40,191	118,373
46	0	11,677	99,875	0	111,552
47	74,879	22,558	0	2,185	99,622
48	0	0	0	92,000	92,000
49	0	0	0	74,750	74,750
50	8,476	33,835	20,527	5,261	68,099
51	13,504	0	35,278	16,800	65,582
52	61,496	0	0	0	61,496

Queen's Counsel	2006-07 £	2007-08 £	2008-09 £	2009-10 £	Grand Total £
53	13,219	0	3,688	18,792	35,699
54	8,446	7,202	15,079	0	30,727
55	5,810	1,762	3,599	16,193	27,364
56	0	0	0	26,315	26,315
57	19,308	1,057	2,938	2,875	26,178
58	0	326	10,581	10,603	21,510
59	0	0	20,814	0	20,814
60	0	0	11,869	0	11,869
61	0	9,500	0	0	9,500
62	0	0	0	6,325	6,325
63	0	0	6,286	0	6,286
64	5,031	0	0	0	5,031
65	0	4,705	0	0	4,705
66	0	0	2,598	0	2,598
Total Direct Payments by NILSC to QCs during Financial Year	11,965,192	9,290,325	11,101,224	15,568,813	47,925,554

TABLE 2: FINANCIAL YEAR 2010-11

Queen's Counsel	2010-11 £
1	897,657
2	704,056
3	691,912
4	577,723
5	465,675
6	399,697
7	362,572
8	362,065
9	308,220
10	305,711
11	282,000
12	209,886
13	190,324
14	186,362

Queen's Counsel	2010-11 £
15	164,991
16	163,510
17	140,866
18	117,500
19	112,483
20	90,873
21	86,744
22	85,086
23	66,400
24	63,793
25	58,750
26	56,230
27	53,890
28	52,241
29	50,371
30	48,244
31	48,008
32	47,221
33	47,000
34	45,162
35	44,889
36	34,207
37	17,932
38	17,867
39	16,331
40	15,936
41	11,874
42	11,690
43	10,728
44	7,986
45	7,068
46	3,960
47	3,874

Queen's Counsel	2010-11 £
48	2,977
49	1,575
50	338
51	68
Total Direct Payments by NILSC to QCs during 2010-11	7,752,523

Prisoner Assessment Unit

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how the services that had been provided by the Prisoner Assessment Unit are currently being delivered.

(AQW 159/11-15)

Mr Ford: All staff from the Prisoner Assessment Unit (PAU) have been redeployed to Maghaberry from where they continue to perform checks and monitor PAU prisoner's progress.

Prisoners in the PAU participate in a three stage testing in the community. Prisoners on phase one are full time residents in the unit and are taught basic life skills. These prisoners have been returned to the prison regime and are not currently being tested in the community. In phase two prisoners reside within the unit and attend work placements Monday to Friday with permission to reside in a hostel or approved home address at the weekends. Prisoners currently on phase two continue to attend work placements from Maghaberry and avail of weekend parole. In phase three of the scheme prisoners are permitted to reside and work full time in the community. Prisoners currently on phase three are continuing to live and work in the community and are still subject to curfew and work placement checks. Phase three prisoners are also required to return to Maghaberry for drug and alcohol testing.

Dangers of Entering Quarries

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) the level of funding provided by (a) the District Policing Partnerships; and (b) the PSNI to community groups to facilitate awareness raising programmes on the dangers of entering quarries; and (ii) where any such awareness programmes are delivered.

(AQW 160/11-15)

Mr Ford: Following consultation with the NIPB and PSNI, I can advise that neither the DPPs nor the PSNI provide funding for this purpose and that neither is aware of any such programmes being delivered.

Prisoner Assessment Unit

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice (i) whether the Prisoner Assessment Unit will be re-opened following the outcome of the investigation into it; and (ii) given that it is a non-essential unit, to detail what savings could be made if it is not re-opened.

(AQW 162/11-15)

Mr Ford:

- (i) A decision on the future operation of the Prisoner Assessment Unit (PAU) will be taken once the findings of the current investigation have been thoroughly considered.
- (ii) It is not possible to accurately determine the long term savings which could be made by not re-opening the PAU. These will depend on what, if any provision is put in its place.

Cost of Keeping a Prisoner in Jail

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) the average cost of keeping a prisoner in jail in each of the last five years; and (ii) how this figure compares with the rest of the UK.

(AQW 174/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Northern Ireland Prison Service does not calculate the cost per prisoner but rather the average cost per prisoner place, which is published in its Annual Report and Accounts. The cost per prisoner place, in each of the last five years, for Northern Ireland and the other UK prison services is detailed in the table A below:

TABLE A

Year	Northern Ireland	England & Wales (Note 1)	Scotland (Note 2)
2006-07	£90,298	£28,734	£40,449
2007-08	£81,254	£29,561	£41,470
2008-09	£81,340	£30,370	£41,724
2009-10	£77,831	£44,006	£36,661
2010-11	£73,835 (Provisional)	Not yet available	Not yet available

Comparisons with other services are not entirely valid because a number of costs that NIPS meets internally are funded by other organisations in England & Wales, eg. Education.

The same range of headquarters services must be provided within NIPS as that provided by England & Wales and Scotland which have higher prison populations. Economies of scale dictate that costs in Northern Ireland will be higher.

Illegal Republican Parades

Mr Moutray asked the Minister of Justice to detail the total number of people who have been (i) prosecuted; and (ii) convicted in relation to illegal republican parades in each of the last two years, broken down by each parade.

(AQW 208/11-15)

Mr Ford: Prosecutions are the responsibility of the Public Prosecution Service (PPS) and convictions are a matter for the courts. With regard to your request, the available information is set out in the table below:

Location	Date	Current Position
Stoneyford	11/7/2009	Proceedings have been initiated against three individuals.
Ormeau Avenue	22/10/0 22/10/2009	Proceedings have been initiated against one individual and a prosecutorial decision is pending against another.
Lurgan	25/7/2010	Summonses have been issued against four individuals.
Galbally	10/10/2010	Proceedings have been initiated against two individuals and the case has been listed for hearing.

Location	Date	Current Position
Lurgan	23/1/2011	Eighteen individuals have been reported to the PPS and these cases are under consideration.

None of the cases listed have reached the stage of conviction.

Legal Cases

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether he intends to introduce legislation to prevent a similar case to that at Lisburn Magistrates Court, where the carer of an elderly person had charges of neglect against them dropped due to an error, and as a consequence, the case was left open to a defence challenge.

(AQW 215/11-15)

Mr Ford: I understand that the Public Prosecution Service identified an administrative oversight relating to the consent for prosecution of this case but the Acting Director rectified the position by moving promptly to issue the required consent. It would not be necessary, or appropriate, to introduce legislation with a view to preventing a reoccurrence.

Convicted Sex Offenders

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Justice to detail the number of convicted sex offenders currently residing in the Limavady Borough Council area.

(AQW 235/11-15)

Mr Ford: My Department is not responsible for recording information on convicted sex offenders who are subject to notification requirements under the Sexual Offences Act 2003.

Information in relation to sex offenders subject to notification may be obtained by contacting the PSNI directly.

Legal Cases

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice if he intends to introduce legislation to ensure that legal cases are not subjected to unreasonable delay which could lead to cases being dismissed, particularly in relation to serious charges, such as, murder.

(AQW 245/11-15)

Mr Ford: I have no plans at the moment to introduce additional time limits for the criminal justice system. A multi-agency programme of work is in place to speed up justice, through which the criminal justice agencies have delivered a number of initiatives, and the average time for progressing cases through the system has improved.

I believe, however, that more fundamental procedural and legislative reform is needed if we are to make significant reduction in delays in the processing of criminal cases, and I intend to bring proposals for reform to the Assembly later in the year. This will include options to address the issue of late guilty pleas, proposals for the reform of committals and options to tackle poor conduct that leads to delay in court.

Orders Prohibiting Publicity on the Granting of Injunctive Relief

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice how many applications to the High Court of Justice have been (i) sought; and (ii) granted for orders prohibiting publicity on the granting of injunctive relief in each year since 2007.

(AQW 257/11-15)

Mr Ford:

- (i) Information on the exact nature of the injunctive relief sought is held on the originating application and cannot be provided without an extensive manual trawl.
- (ii) Since 2007 four orders prohibiting publicity on the granting of injunctive relief have been made.

Independent Membership of the Policing Board

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice how many applications were received in the recent trawl for independent membership of the Policing Board.

(AQW 268/11-15)

Mr Ford: There were 193 applications received in the recent competition for independent membership of the Policing Board.

Royal Ulster Constabulary Reserve GC Gratuity Payment

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Justice what steps his Department has taken to ensure that the Royal Ulster Constabulary Reserve GC gratuity payment will be treated as a special payment by Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs. [R]

(AQW 270/11-15)

Mr Ford: Officials from my Department have been in contact with Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) since the devolution of policing and justice in April, when I accepted responsibility for administering the police Part-Time Reserve Gratuity Scheme as set out by the Northern Ireland Office.

The Department has provided HMRC with all of the information required by them to inform us on how the payments should be treated. HMRC advice has consistently been that since these payments relate to an individual's employment and do not fall within any of the existing exemptions, they would be liable to tax and national insurance. The liability will depend on the status of the individual.

The DOJ has always understood that HMRC are able only to operate within the parameters of existing tax law and they have been very clear that no exemption has been found for these payments.

My Department has not had any discussions with the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister in relation to the tax status of the Gratuity payments.

Royal Ulster Constabulary Reserve GC Gratuity Payment

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Justice what steps he will take to ensure that people entitled to a payment from the Royal Ulster Constabulary Reserve GC gratuity payment will receive the amount in full and free from tax and National Insurance contributions. [R]

(AQW 271/11-15)

Mr Ford: Officials from my Department have been in contact with Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) since the devolution of policing and justice in April, when I accepted responsibility for administering the police Part-Time Reserve Gratuity Scheme as set out by the Northern Ireland Office.

The Department has provided HMRC with all of the information required by them to inform us on how the payments should be treated. HMRC advice has consistently been that since these payments relate to an individual's employment and do not fall within any of the existing exemptions, they would be liable to tax and national insurance. The liability will depend on the status of the individual.

The DOJ has always understood that HMRC are able only to operate within the parameters of existing tax law and they have been very clear that no exemption has been found for these payments.

My Department has not had any discussions with the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister in relation to the tax status of the Gratuity payments.

Royal Ulster Constabulary Reserve GC Gratuity Payment

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Justice whether his Department has had any discussions with (i) Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs; or (ii) the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister in relation to the tax status of the Royal Ulster Constabulary Reserve GC Gratuity Payment Scheme payouts. [R]

(AQW 272/11-15)

Mr Ford: Officials from my Department have been in contact with Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) since the devolution of policing and justice in April, when I accepted responsibility for administering the police Part-Time Reserve Gratuity Scheme as set out by the Northern Ireland Office.

The Department has provided HMRC with all of the information required by them to inform us on how the payments should be treated. HMRC advice has consistently been that since these payments relate to an individual's employment and do not fall within any of the existing exemptions, they would be liable to tax and national insurance. The liability will depend on the status of the individual.

The DOJ has always understood that HMRC are able only to operate within the parameters of existing tax law and they have been very clear that no exemption has been found for these payments.

My Department has not had any discussions with the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister in relation to the tax status of the Gratuity payments.

Firearm Certificate

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice to detail the number of appeals against a decision to (i) revoke; or (ii) not renew a firearm certificate in each of the last five years; and, of these, how many were successful.

(AQW 297/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Minister of Justice became responsible for decisions on firearm appeals on 12 April 2010.

The information requested from that date is set out below:

Period	Appeals following revocation		Appeals following non renewal *	
	Received	Successful	Received	Successful
12/4/10 – 31/12/10	31	3	27	3
1/1/11 – 31/5/11	17	0 **	14	0 ***

* Includes non renewals on variations of existing certificates

** of the cases processed following revocation

*** of the cases processed following non renewal

Security Provision for Serving Police Officers

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Justice to detail the additional resources he has provided to the Chief Constable to enhance security provision for serving police officers.

(AQW 324/11-15)

Mr Ford: The allocation of the resources provided within the police grant is an operational matter for the Chief Constable. Earlier this year the Coalition Government agreed to guarantee an additional £199.5m required by the PSNI to tackle the threat from terrorism over the next four years. This was on top of £45m from the Executive over the same time span. Some of this funding will be used to enhance security for officers. It would not be appropriate to comment on the precise allocation or the specific steps taken by the Chief Constable.

Prisoner: Devidas Palautis

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 18/11-15, whether he intends to seek the extradition of Devidas Paliutis from the Republic of Ireland so that he can face the charges from which he absconded and be charged with escaping from lawful custody.

(AQW 363/11-15)

Mr Ford: The extradition of a prisoner 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.

You may therefore wish to direct your question to the PSNI.

Compensation Payments

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Justice when the findings of the review of the discount rate which is used to calculate compensation payments for people who have sustained personal injuries will be released.

(AQW 417/11-15)

Mr Ford: Review of the discount rate is ongoing. My Department has sought views from the Government Actuary's Department and the Department of Finance and Personnel as required by the Damages Act 1996 and has received representations from stakeholders. In light of the views the Lord Chancellor has received in reviewing the discount rate in England and Wales, he has recently decided to take forward public consultation on the methodology to be used in setting the rate. Given this development and the read across to Northern Ireland, where similar views have been received in our review, consideration is being given to carrying out consultation on this issue covering Northern Ireland.

Department for Regional Development

Road Gritting

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he intends to review the policy and guidelines on winter road gritting, to ensure that all rural school bus routes are salted.

(AQW 109/11-15)

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): The Member may be aware that, following the severe wintry conditions experienced during December 2008, the then Minister for the Department for Regional Development asked the Department's Roads Service to carry out an examination of its operational response to areas around rural schools. This examination resulted in Roads Service introducing enhanced communication arrangements and priority secondary salting to the 46 rural schools most affected by weather conditions throughout the winter of 2008/09.

The list of schools benefiting from these enhanced actions is subject to change over time to include more schools, to take account of the way that adverse weather can affect different rural schools throughout the winter. As a result of the wintry weather during 2009/10 and its impact on road conditions leading to rural schools, six additional schools were added to the list in the 2010/11 season, increasing the number of rural schools on the list to 50.

At the time of the examination of Roads Service's operational response, the criteria for the provision of grit/salt piles and salt bins was also amended, so that these can be provided to affected schools, if requested.

As there have not been significant changes since the previous examination was carried out, I have no plans to carry out a further review of the winter service policy and guidelines on winter road salting on roads leading to rural schools.

Taxi Fares for Bus and Train Drivers

Mr Wells asked the Minister for Regional Development how much Translink has spent on taxi fares for bus and train drivers in each of the last three financial years.

(AQW 113/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink have advised that they are unable to produce the information at the level of detail requested without a detailed review of all individual taxi costs. The total costs incurred in respect of taxis for all Translink staff in each of the last three financial years is as follows:

	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Staff taxi costs	£52,848	£53,312	£69,597

Roads Maintenance Budget

Mr Beggs asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the proportion of the roads maintenance budget that is currently spent on reactive maintenance and whether this is sustainable over (i) the next four years; and (ii) the next decade.

(AQW 127/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that based on expenditure over recent financial years, in the region of 25% of the total structural maintenance expenditure has been spent on reactive maintenance (patching) of roads and footways.

Roads Service officials acknowledge that unplanned reactive patching work of road surfaces does not provide good value for money. Nonetheless, in the short term, such work is essential to maintain the serviceability of roads and footways, where localised failures occur.

It is widely recognised that a sustainable level of expenditure on reactive patching would be in the region of 10% of the structural maintenance budget. The current level of expenditure on reactive maintenance would not, therefore be considered to be sustainable, as the cost of relatively expensive patching to avoid public liability claims and maintain road safety, is drawing scarce funds away from better value for money resurfacing and surface dressing activities.

Roads Service

Mr Beggs asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) how much Roads Service has spent on (a) reactive patching of roads; and (b) public liability claims, in each of the last five years; and (ii) to provide an estimate of the cost of (a) the maintenance backlog; and (b) the annual cost of road maintenance to maintain the roads in their present state.

(AQW 129/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Details of expenditure by my Department's Roads Service on carriageway patching in each of the last five financial years, for which information is available, is provided in the table below. These figures include the cost of repairing a range of surface defect types including potholes, cracking, depressions and edge deterioration.

Year	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
Patching	£15,860,000	£16,329,000	£17,379,000	£19,035,000	£18,012,000

The table below details expenditure by Roads Service on public liability claims in each of the last five financial years.

	Personal Injury	Property Damage	Vehicle Damage	Total
2010/2011	£3,950,525.13	£149,984.22	£348,366.18	£4,448,875.53

	Personal Injury	Property Damage	Vehicle Damage	Total
2009/2010	£3,979,695.28	£104,179.41	£245,667.62	£4,329,542.31
2008/2009	£3,939,117.16	£68,300.81	£188,882.87	£4,196,300.84
2007/2008	£3,985,284.80	£54,883.08	£162,147.59	£4,202,315.47
2006/2007	£3,126,333.44	£59,832.70	£172,298.21	£3,358,464.35

Roads Service has advised that the measured structural maintenance backlog was estimated at approximately £755 million in 2009. This is the latest figure available.

I am advised the annual cost of maintaining the road network in its present state, is currently estimated at approximately £116.5 million.

Traffic Calming Measures in the Glens Estate, Limavady

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Regional Development what consideration his Department has given to the provision of traffic calming measures in the Glens Estate, Limavady.
(AQW 131/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that assessments for a traffic calming scheme were carried out for the Glens Estate, Limavady on Glengiven Avenue and Glenview Drive in 2006 and in 2008. At the time of the assessments, the Glens Estate did not score as highly as other locations within the traffic calming programme and, therefore, no traffic calming measures were implemented.

However, I can inform you that Roads Service will arrange for a new traffic calming assessment to be carried out which will include traffic volume and speed surveys on Glengiven Avenue and Glenview Drive. Other factors, including the previous three-year collision history at this location, will be taken into account.

Any resulting proposals will have to compete for priority with other similar requests for traffic calming schemes and I have asked the Divisional Roads Manager, Roads Service Northern Division, to contact you once the results of the assessment has been completed.

Car Parking Charges in Town Centres

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development when he intends to make a decision on the issue of car parking charges in town centres.
(AQW 144/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: In response to the potential impact on retail trade, I have initiated a review of the policy of introducing new on-street parking charges in towns throughout Northern Ireland.

I intend to announce my decision in the very near future.

Extreme Weather Conditions

Mr S Anderson asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the preparedness of Roads Service to deal with any extreme weather conditions in winter 2011/12, to ensure that the difficulties that were experienced in the winter of 2010/11 are not repeated.
(AQW 147/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I can confirm that my Department's Roads Service has in place sufficient finance, labour and materials to satisfactorily carry out the Winter Service programme for the incoming winter season of 2011/12.

Although Roads Service has no statutory obligation to salt roads, it does earmark funds to provide a salting service with the aim of helping main road traffic to move safely and freely in wintry conditions through the removal of snow and the gritting of the salted network across Northern Ireland.

Prior to the start of each winter service season, Roads Service undertakes a significant amount of pre planning to ensure a state of readiness for the coming winter. As well as a number of routine pre-season checks, planning includes ensuring that adequate staffing arrangements are in place including training for new staff where required, that there is an adequate supply of salt, and that winter service equipment is in working order.

It is Roads Service's policy to salt main through routes carrying more than 1,500 vehicles per day and other busy through routes, where there are difficult circumstances such as steep hills, carrying more than 1,000 vehicles per day. In applying the criteria, buses get a high weighting. For example, a 40 seater bus is counted as 40 vehicles. This policy results in the provision of a salted network of approximately 7,000 km (4,300 miles) covering 28% of roads in Northern Ireland, targeting Roads Service's resources to the busier routes carrying most traffic.

Efforts are also made to ensure that small settlements of more than 100 dwellings have a treated link to the salted network and consideration is given to placing grit piles or salt bins at hills, bends or junctions on roads that are not salted.

In addition, Roads Service has introduced improvements to its operational response around rural schools regularly affected by adverse weather conditions. These improvements have ensured better communications between Roads Service and schools which experience difficulties and has allowed Roads Service to provide a more flexible and timely response as and when road conditions necessitate.

Whilst it is never possible to completely counteract the full forces of nature, based on the information currently available, it is my assessment that Roads Service is well prepared to deal with the incoming winter season.

Road Calming Measures in the Holywood Area

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what road calming measures are planned for the Holywood area in this financial year.

(AQW 151/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that, subject to the successful completion of the legislative processes, it plans to construct traffic calming measures in the following areas of Holywood during this financial year:

- Abbey Ring area (incorporating Abbey Ring, Abbot's Wood, East Link, West Link, West Green and Oakley Avenue); and
- Church View area (incorporating Church View, Spencer Street and Ean Hill).

Priors Lea, Holywood

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development if he has any plans to improve the parking facilities for the residents of Priors Lea, Holywood, particularly the elderly.

(AQW 176/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it has an agreed policy with the Northern Ireland Housing Executive to deal with requests, for the provision of additional car parking in former Housing Executive estates. Under this policy, Roads Service does not provide parking for amenity reasons, however, it recognises that there may be locations where additional parking provision may help to address road safety or traffic progression concerns.

Roads Service officials have advised that recent surveys at Priors Lea did not identify any road safety or traffic progression concerns, and a scheme to provide additional car parking facilities in this area would attract a lower priority when compared against other potential improvement schemes. Given

these circumstances, Roads Service has no current plans to provide additional parking facilities at Priors Lea.

Traffic Calming Measures in the Beechfield Estate, Donaghadee

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development if he plans to introduce the traffic calming measures that have been requested by the local community in the Beechfield Estate, Donaghadee.
(AQW 178/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service receives many requests for traffic calming schemes and, as demand greatly exceeds the capacity to supply these measures, priorities must be established.

Roads Service assesses scores and prioritises all requests for traffic calming schemes within each Council area. There are currently 90 schemes identified for the Ards Council area and Beechfield Estate, Donaghadee is ranked at 66 on this list. In these circumstances, I regret to advise you that a traffic calming scheme in the Beechfield Estate would not be promoted in the foreseeable future, under current funding levels.

Footpaths and Roads in the Beechfield Estate, Donaghadee

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development if he has any plans to resurface the footpaths and roads in the Beechfield Estate, Donaghadee.
(AQW 179/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that while it plans to commence footway improvements in the Beechfield Estate, Donaghadee, during this financial year, it has no plans to carry out any resurfacing on the roads.

A2 Road Widening Scheme

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail any plans he has to progress the A2 Road Widening Scheme between Silverstream Banks and Seapark in Carrickfergus.
(AQW 181/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: As Minister for Regional Development, I am determined to ensure that there are improvements across the Strategic Road Network which will enhance safety, reduce journey times and provide value for money.

On that basis, I intend to consider the proposed investment across my Department, including the impact of Budget 2010 on the strategic roads programme, and to explore opportunities to bring forward schemes, such as the A2 Shore Road, Greenisland project.

Blue Badges

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Regional Development, in relation to applications for, or renewal of, Blue Badges, how much is paid to a GP who supplies a medical report at the request of his Department.
(AQW 214/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the fee payable to a GP who supplies a medical report for a Blue Badge application is £22.85.

Roads in Housing Developments

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister for Regional Development what action he intends to take to ensure that the Planning Service do not allow roads in housing developments to be designated as private roads.
(AQW 230/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Department of the Environment's Planning Division consults with my Department's Roads Service, who 'determine' the layout and construction of roads, footways, drainage and street lighting within new housing developments.

The Private Streets (NI) Order 1980 requires developers to enter into an agreement with Roads Service, before construction, to provide the road infrastructure for the development. This agreement is secured by a bond, which allows Roads Service to complete the works, should the developer default.

The Private Streets Order also makes provision for a street to remain private, should the developer requests it and the Department is in agreement. Such an arrangement may be acceptable and appropriate in certain circumstances, for example, shared driveways, small culs-de-sac, gated developments, service roads etc. I have no plans to remove this option, but Roads Service will continue to ensure that the facility is only exercised where appropriate.

Incomplete Housing Developments

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister for Regional Development what action he is taking to ensure that administrators of incomplete housing developments are aware of the urgent need to complete private roads.

(AQW 233/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that, where an administrator is appointed, it will liaise with them as the person responsible for completion of housing development roads that have been determined for adoption. If a housing development road (a private street) is not properly constructed within a reasonable time, the Department may initiate enforcement action under Article 11 of the Private Streets (NI) Order 1980, requiring the responsible person to complete the works within a specified time.

However, my Department can only take action to secure completion of those streets that have been determined for adoption under the Private Streets Order. This does not include private roads or driveways.

Unadopted Street Lights

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the number of unadopted street lights, broken down by Roads Service division.

(AQW 236/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it is unable to provide details of the number of unadopted street lights, as it only records these assets once they have been adopted. Roads Service currently operates and maintains some 271,000 street lights.

NI Water

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister for Regional Development, in light of the announcement by NI Water on 18th May 2011 in relation to customers being billed incorrectly, what measures his Department is taking to ensure that businesses are not further negatively affected.

(AQW 239/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I refer the Member to my answer to AQW 73/11-15 enclosed.

AQW 73/11-15

Under the Water and Sewerage Services (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 customer billing is the operational responsibility of Northern Ireland Water (NIW) and is regulated by the Utility Regulator. Indeed the current issue was revealed through a programme of action NIW has been undertaking to improve its data as a result of formal enforcement action by the Utility Regulator following an investigation in 2008. While regrettable, it is important not to lose sight of the fact that the errors were discovered through efforts to improve data reliability – something we should all support. The priority is for NIW to implement the necessary improvements.

I have been advised by NIW that, in order to prevent a reoccurrence, they have implemented a number of actions. These include (a) initiation of a comprehensive check of metered supply pipes (b) plans to check all non-domestic customer pipe sizes as part of the normal meter reading schedule (c) plans to revise procedures to ensure the accurate recording and cross checking of both pipe and meter size at all new connections and (d) plans to introduce improvements for recording meter and pipe size in the billing system.

Street Lightening Schemes

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail any street lightening schemes planned for (i) the Holywood area; (ii) the Bangor West area; and (iii) the Abbey area of Bangor, in each of the next three years.

(AQW 243/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the following street lighting schemes are currently programmed for the North Down Council area during the 20011/12 financial year:

- Seahill Road, Holywood;
- Carolsteen, Helens Bay;
- Downshire Road, Mews and Place, Bangor; and
- Moira Drive and Avenue, Bangor.

The programme of street lighting schemes in future years is not yet developed and will depend on budget allocations and other priorities at that time.

Unadopted Roads

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the total number of unadopted roads in each Roads Service Division area in (i) January 2005; (ii) January 2008; and (iii) January 2011.

(AQW 246/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it is not responsible for unadopted roads and as such, it does not keep a record of the number of such roads.

I am further advised however, that a study is underway to establish information about unadopted roads in Northern Ireland, which will help inform future decisions. It is anticipated that the results of this study will be available in the Autumn.

20mph Speed Limit

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the pilot scheme to enforce a 20mph speed limit in the areas around Hazlett Primary School in Coleraine and Kilmoyle Primary School in Ballymoney during school times; and whether there are any plans to roll out this scheme to other areas.

(AQW 249/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that, following the introduction of the pilot schemes at Hezlett Primary School, Coleraine and Kilmoyle Primary School, Ballymoney, assessments were carried out to evaluate their effectiveness. These studies indicated that the introduction of the 20 mph part-time speed limits were effective at reducing vehicle speeds when the speed limit signs are illuminated.

Prior to the introduction of the 20 mph part-time speed limits, the mean speed of traffic was approximately 46 mph at Hezlett Primary School and 47 mph at Kilmoyle Primary School. Assessments carried out following the introduction of the part-time speed limit showed there were marked reductions in the mean speed noted at both schools. At Hezlett Primary School, the reduction was between 19 and 22 mph, and at Kilmoyle Primary School, the reduction was between 18 and 25 mph.

The costs involved in introducing these pilot schemes were significant and Roads Service is currently evaluating practical issues that would help to provide a more economical implementation programme. At present, there is no funding available to roll out a programme for the introduction of variable speed limit schemes at primary schools. However, every effort will be made to bring about such a programme and to prioritise delivery when funding becomes available.

Street Lighting Schemes

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what new street lighting schemes are planned for the (i) Ballyholme; (ii) Groomsport; (iii) Donaghadee; and (iv) Millisle areas over the next three years. **(AQW 252/11-15)**

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it currently has no plans for new street lighting schemes in either the North Down Council area, which includes Ballyholme and Groomsport, or in the Donaghadee and Millisle areas over the next three years.

However, a street lighting replacement programme is being implemented for the North Down Council area during the current financial year at the following locations:

- Seahill Road, Holywood;
- Carolsteen, Helens Bay;
- Downshire Road Mews and Place, Bangor; and
- Moira Drive and Avenue, Bangor.

The programme for future years has not been developed at this stage, however, such a programme will be dependent on budget allocations and other priorities at that time.

Railway Halt at the Ikea Store

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans there are to provide a railway halt at the Ikea store between Holywood and Knocknagoney. **(AQW 253/11-15)**

Mr Kennedy: Translink do not have provision within their current Capital Plan for a rail halt at the Ikea store between Holywood and Knocknagoney. There are no current plans for such a halt to be developed within existing budgets as agreed at Executive level.

Traffic Calming Measures

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development what traffic calming measures are planned for (i) Bangor; and (ii) Donaghadee in (a) 2011/12; and (b) 2012/13. **(AQW 254/11-15)**

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service receives many requests for traffic calming schemes and as demand greatly exceeds the capacity to supply these measures, all proposals are assessed, scored and prioritised. Works programmes are then drawn up on an annual basis, which are published each year in the Spring Roads Service Report to Councils. These programmes may be subject to change, depending on the assessed priority of new requests for traffic calming.

In relation to the 2011/12 financial year, I can advise that Roads Service proposes to provide the following traffic calming schemes in Bangor:

TRAFFIC CALMING SCHEMES PLANNED IN BANGOR IN 2011/12

Name of Scheme	Streets included in scheme
Ballymacconnell Road South	Ballymacconnell Road South and Ashford Drive

Name of Scheme	Streets included in scheme
Bryansburn Road	Bryansburn Road
Brunswick Road	Brunswick Road
Groomsport Road	Groomsport Road, Windmill Road and Bellevue
Old Belfast Road	Old Belfast Road, Killeen Avenue and Killeen Drive

Progression of these schemes is subject to the successful conclusion of the public consultation and legislative processes, with the exception of the Ballymacconnell Road South scheme, for which the legislative process has already been completed.

There are currently 90 schemes identified for the Ards Borough Council area, however, the next scheme planned for Donaghadee is Cypress Park, which is unlikely to be included in the 2011/12 or 2012/13 Traffic Calming programmes on the basis of its prioritised position on the list.

I can advise that the detailed 2012/13 budget for this work area has not yet been finalised and it is therefore not possible to provide details of the works programme at this time.

Roads

Mr Craig asked the Minister for Regional Development how much money is scheduled to be spent on roads in each constituency over the next twelve months.

(AQW 275/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it does not maintain an analysis of budget / spend on a constituency basis.

In distributing the resources available for road maintenance, allocations are made to the four Roads Service Divisions on the basis of need using a range of weighted indicators tailored to each maintenance activity, such as, resurfacing, patching, gully emptying, grass cutting etc. Divisions use these indicators when apportioning budgets across Council areas to ensure, as far as possible, an equitable distribution of available funds across the whole of Northern Ireland.

The Capital funds, used to implement various local transport and safety measures, minor works schemes and bridge strengthening programme are allocated to each of the Divisions which then apportion amounts to the various disciplines on a priority basis.

Door-to-Door Transport Services

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he supports a reduction in the Door-to-Door transport services for people with disabilities, as outlined in the invitation to tender that was issued by his Department during the previous Assembly mandate.

(AQW 307/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The invitation to tender, referred to, asked bidders to submit proposals for a "core hours" Door-to-Door service between 9:00am and 5:00pm, Monday to Friday. Additionally bidders were asked to provide costs for service delivery in the "non-core hours" of 7:30am to 9:00am and 5:00pm to 11:30pm Monday to Friday and between 7:30am and 11:30 pm on Saturdays and Sundays.

The intention of the new tender specification is to protect service delivery during the busy core hours but also allows for services in "non-core hours", with the number of trips to be determined by the available budget.

You are aware that the majority of "Door-to-Door" services are currently subject to a procurement exercise which is subject to an ongoing legal challenge. We hope that this can be resolved as quickly as possible. This will secure the provision of services on a long term basis. In the interim I have ensured existing services are maintained.

A2 Upgrade

Mr Dickson asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he will visit Carrickfergus Borough Council to outline his Department's stance on the A2 upgrade.

(AQW 372/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Member will be aware that a number of MLAs, who are also members of Carrickfergus Borough Council, were in attendance during the Adjournment debate held on 31 May 2011 in the Assembly Chamber on the Upgrade of the A2 in East Antrim.

Having made my statement during Adjournment Debate to outline my Department's position on the scheme, I do not feel there would be any benefit in reiterating this in the Council Chamber.

A Hansard record of the Adjournment Debate is available to view on the Northern Ireland Assembly website.

I have asked my Department's Roads Service officials to make themselves available should you, or any member of Carrickfergus Council, wish to discuss any aspect or detail of the proposed scheme for the Upgrade of the A2 Shore Road, Greenisland.

Department for Social Development

Renovating Properties in the Bloomfield Area of Bangor

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development what plans his Department has for renovating properties in the Bloomfield area of Bangor.

(AQW 201/11-15)

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): The pensioners' bungalows in the Bloomfield Estate had initially been programmed for a Multi Element Improvement scheme that would have seen significant work undertaken to upgrade homes in the area. However due to pressures across the housing budget, this scheme, along with all other Multi Element Improvement schemes, are now being reviewed.

Part of this review will include looking at what improvements may be possible as part of the Housing Executives ongoing revenue improvement work. I will also want to evaluate the recent pilot undertaken in Rinmore that may also provide an alternative method of delivering these sorts of improvements that are long overdue for residents.

Housing Renovation Schemes

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the housing renovation schemes his Department has planned for the North Down area over the next four years.

(AQW 202/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The table below details the Housing Executive's programme of housing schemes for the North Down area during the next four years. These schemes are subject to the availability of funding.

Year	Project	Type of Work	Number of Dwellings	Estimated Cost
2011/12	Bangor Local Area Priorities which mainly covers:- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Kilcooley ■ Bloomfield ■ Rathgill ■ Loughview 	External Cyclical Maintenance / Windows	284	£450k
	Bangor Medium Rise Flats:- Spencer Street/ Church Green, Hollywood	Fire doors	36	£120k
	Crawfordsburn/ Groomsport	Heating	80	£462k
	Hollywood	Heating	101	£515k
	Churchill/Redburn	Kitchens	97	£456k (Reserve scheme)
2012/13	No programme as yet			
2013/14	Groomsport	Heating	9	£40k
	Rathgill Phase 3	Kitchens	36	£186k
2014/15	Kilcooley/ Groomsport	Kitchens	120	£619k
	Kilcooley Phase 2	Kitchens	106	£520k
	Kilcooley Phase 3	Kitchens	101	£515k

Due to pressures across the housing budget all Multi Element Improvement schemes are now being reviewed.

Part of this review will include looking at what improvements may be possible as part of the Housing Executives ongoing revenue improvement work. I will also want to evaluate the recent pilot undertaken in Rinmore that may also provide an alternative method of delivering these sort of improvements that are long overdue for residents.

Housing Associations

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development what consideration is being given to increasing the regulation of Housing Associations.

(AQW 256/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Department established Housing Division as the regulatory authority under the Housing (NI) Order 1992. There are a number of measures undertaken by the Department to regulate Registered Housing Associations. The key areas are:

Inspection – a rolling programme of inspections which are carried out to determine individual Housing Associations compliance of the Housing Associations Guide.

Monitoring – which includes:

- The review of each Registered Housing Association's board minutes.
- The collection and review of relevant financial information on a quarterly basis.
- The collection and review of information concerning each Registered Housing Association's stock on a yearly basis via the Annual Regulatory Return.

The regulatory function has been enhanced recently as follows:

The number of Inspectors within the Inspection Team is to be doubled from June 2011. This measure was a consequence of my predecessor's desire to ensure the continuation of inspection and monitoring of housing associations by the allocation of additional resources for this function.

The action taken is dictated by what is found during the inspection or monitoring process:

Inspection – if the Registered Housing Association fails its inspection the Department imposes a series of tiered sanctions which, ultimately, could lead to de-registration. In the past year, 2 Registered Housing Associations have merged with another Association as a result of receiving failed inspections and there are currently a number of Registered Housing Associations in the process of entering into Group Structure with a stronger parent association retaining ultimate control of the weaker association.

Monitoring – queries identified are followed up with the appropriate Housing Association and answers deemed unacceptable can result in an inspection visit.

Retail and Car Parking Projects in Coleraine Town Centre

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Social Development if he will examine the two proposed significant retail and car parking projects in Coleraine town centre so that an early commencement date can be achieved.

(AQW 281/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I hope to visit Coleraine in the near future to see at first hand the work my Department is doing to help deprived communities and to promote the regeneration of the town centre. As part of my visit I hope to see the sites of both the Lanes and Ramparts development schemes and meet the developers to hear about their plans. In particular, I will discuss with them any actions that my Department can take to assist them and ensure that both schemes commence as soon as they are economically viable.

Special Purchase of Evacuated Dwellings Scheme

Mr Craig asked the Minister for Social Development how much funding has been allocated to the Special Purchase of Evacuated Dwellings scheme in each of the last three financial years.

(AQW 305/11-15)

Mr McCausland: At the beginning of each of the three years, the Special Purchase of Evacuated Dwellings (SPED) scheme was assumed to be self financing with the estimated receipts from sales set at the same level as projected acquisitions. However, due to the nature of the scheme and the necessary discount on the sales price of SPED properties, combined with the downturn in the housing market, the scheme has required additional funding to be allocated, either through monitoring rounds or from existing housing budget allocations. The table below contains the relevant information.

Year	Expenditure	Receipts Generated	Net Funding required from Annual Deficit Grant
2008/09	£9,543,000	£1,940,000	£7,603,000
2009/10	£6,141,000	£5,244,000	£897,000
2010/11	£4,587,000	£3,382,000	£1,205,000

Housing in West Green, Holywood

Mr Dunne asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the proposals for the new social housing scheme to replace the demolished flats at West Green, Holywood.

(AQW 308/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Our initial plans for a new housing scheme on the site of the old flats at West Green in Holywood indicated that up to 55 new family homes could be delivered. However this will be subject to final agreement with Planning Service and whilst those discussions are now underway, it is still too early to confirm what may eventually be possible on this site.

Once a detailed scheme that could attract support from Planning Service has been developed, I will be happy to share that detail not just with the member who has had a long interest in this issue, but will ensure it is shared with the local community so their views can also be taken into account.

Minimum Pricing of Alcohol

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development what plans he has to discuss the legislation on the minimum pricing of alcohol with his Scottish counterpart and to consider what lessons can be learned in Northern Ireland.

(AQW 314/11-15)

Mr McCausland: A joint DSD/DHSSPS consultation on the introduction of minimum pricing of alcohol ends on 26 June and I intend to discuss this issue with the Minister for Health shortly. Following the end of the consultation we will agree the way forward. In the interim, my officials are continuing to monitor developments in Scotland on this matter and continue to meet with Scottish officials regularly.

Lands Adjacent to 51 Burren Road, Warrenpoint

Ms Ruane asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of the procurement procedures used by the South Ulster Housing Association in relation to planning application 2009/0357/F for lands adjacent to 51 Burren Road, Warrenpoint; and whether these procurement procedures are applied in line with the relevant EU directives.

(AQW 315/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I am unable to make any assessment given that there has been no work commissioned by South Ulster or any other Housing Association in relation to this site which would have necessitated a procurement exercise.

This site is privately owned and the planning permission was granted to Kelly Brothers, a local private developer. I understand there is a condition in the planning consent requiring the provision of social housing and that provision should be managed and maintained by either South Ulster or any other Housing Association registered with my Department. However unless the owner is prepared to sell the land for development by a Housing Association, it will not be possible to meet that planning requirement and as a result, no Housing Associations are currently involved in developing social housing on that site.

Disability Living Allowance Appeals

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the total cost of Disability Living Allowance appeals in the last financial year.

(AQW 316/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Appeals Service does not distinguish administration costs between individual benefits, so it is not possible to provide the total cost of Disability Living Allowance (DLA) appeals in 2010-11. However, total Appeals Service costs in 2010-11 were £5.33m, with the average cost of all hearings in the year being approximately £256.

There were 8278 DLA hearings in 2010-11 and the Social Security Agency also incurred costs of £1.02m in the appeals section of the benefit branch during the last year.

Severe Winter Weather

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development whether there is a plan in place to mitigate the effects of any future severe winter weather on Housing Executive properties.

(AQW 317/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Following the previous period of severe adverse weather, the Housing Executive carried out a review of performance and, in light of the lessons learned, the Housing Executive has revised its Emergency and Business Continuity Plans, as well as those prepared by its maintenance contractors. The plans address the response required to increased telephony requirements and the contractors' response to increased workload both within and outside of working hours during periods of high service demand. In addition the plans consider other types of emergency which may occur and the nature of responses required. The Housing Executive has also completed a review of lessons learned which highlighted a number of areas where additional physical works, including insulation and heating related matters, could be undertaken to mitigate the risk of reoccurrence in the event of further bouts of adverse weather. Over the next few months they will conduct a formal test of the emergency plans and response procedures to refine and assist in preparations for future emergency events such as adverse weather conditions.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how many people in North Down are in receipt of Disability Living Allowance.

(AQW 318/11-15)

Mr McCausland: There are 5,250 people in North Down who are in receipt of Disability Living Allowance at May 2011.

Social Housing Proposals for Rasharkin

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Social Development what social housing proposals are being considered for Rasharkin.

(AQW 319/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I am still considering the Social Housing Development Programme and will advise the member of the proposals for Rasharkin within the coming weeks.

Beechfield Estate, Donaghadee

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how many properties in the Beechfield Estate, Donaghadee are owned by the Housing Executive.

(AQW 339/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive owns properties in the Beechfield Estate at the following locations:-

Location	Number of Properties
Ashfield Court	35
Ashfield Drive	42
Beechfield Drive	70
Cannyreagh Road	13

Location	Number of Properties
Elmfield Park	29
Elmfield Walk	11
Oakfield Walk	10
Pine Park	6
Total	216

Neighbourhood Renewal

Mr Moutray asked the Minister for Social Development how much funding his Department has allocated to Neighbourhood Renewal in each council area in each year since May 2007.

(AQW 340/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The table below details funding allocated by the Department for Social Development to Neighbourhood Renewal Areas in each council area from April 2007 to March 2011. Figures relate to contracts awarded which may span multiple years.

Council Area (number of Neighbourhood Renewal Areas)	Allocation 2007/08	Allocation 2008/09	Allocation 2009/10	Allocation 2010/11
Armagh (1)	£1,099,577	£304,460	£325,759	£342,261
Ballymena (1)	£940,264	£537,076	£424,136	£447,840
Belfast (13)	£14,142,936	£6,025,815	£12,626,377	£13,975,697
Castlereagh (1)	£375,029	£678,609	£214,329	£182,495
Coleraine (2)	£815,959	£2,268,272	£296,289	£461,297
Craigavon (3)	£1,572,283	£3,935,586	£1,666,513	£951,684
Londonderry (4)	£3,320,865	£2,887,720	£4,535,902	£2,829,213
Down (1)	£1,981,354	£418,499	-	£515,878
Dungannon (1)	£305,501	£889,683	£764,459	£887,149
Fermanagh (1)	£150,411	£260,522	£453,733	£428,099
Limavady (1)	£115,842	£56,725	£375,495	£313,740
Lisburn (1)	£1,149,288	£1,312,452	£985,777	£2,067,139
Newry & Mourne (1)	£1,013,389	£1,530,814	£906,243	£588,361
Newtownabbey (2)	£217,995	£89,971	£192,595	£103,011
North Down (1)	£524,595	£589,174	£151,758	£182,138
Omagh (1)	£406,575	£741,528	£744,797	£796,423
Strabane (1)	£238,111	£984,933	£671,311	£501,358

Notes:

- 1 A range of factors will influence allocation including, notably capital projects. The history of investment in an area from other initiatives or mainstream sources, the size (population) of an area the geographical location and proximity to existing services and the 'lead-in' period required to establish structures and produce Neighbourhood Renewal Action Plans will also impact on ability to utilise funds.

Ballaghmore Heights, Enniskillen

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the refurbishment of the ten existing homes at Ballaghmore Heights, Enniskillen.

(AQW 364/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The ten existing properties at Ballaghmore Heights, Enniskillen were previously in use as family accommodation for military personnel and Clanmil acquired these properties at the end of March 2011.

The refurbishment works include the use of renewable technologies in the form of photovoltaic panels, shower heat recovery exchangers and wood burning stoves helping achieve an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) B rating. The performance of the building fabric is also being increased to achieve an improvement of 23% over current Building Control standards.

Lowry Bros have been appointed as the main contractors for the refurbishment scheme and took possession of the site on 31 March 2011. The work progressing under the direction of the main contractor includes site set up, erection of security fencing/hoarding, provision of site compound and welfare facilities and initial striping out works. Clanmil advises that it expects the work on the refurbished family homes to be completed by Autumn 2011.

Child Support Agency

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister for Social Development what action he is taking to ensure that all details held by the Child Support Agency in relation to clients and cases will be transferred to its new IT system.

(AQW 382/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department is planning for the introduction of a new system of statutory child maintenance. It will be a simpler scheme, which will use latest available tax year information from Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC), to calculate child maintenance assessments.

When launched the new scheme will be available only to new clients. Only after a successful period of live running will the new scheme be extended to existing clients. Existing clients will then be able to apply to the new scheme or make their own maintenance arrangements. Existing cases will be closed with no details transferred to the new IT system. However, any outstanding arrears will still be payable.

The Green Paper, "Strengthening families, promoting parental responsibility: the future of child maintenance, was issued in January 2011. I will be considering the longer term position for child maintenance in Northern Ireland over the coming months.

Social Security Benefits

Mr Craig asked the Minister for Social Development for an estimate of how much will be spent on Social Security Benefits in this financial year; and how much has been spent in each of the last five financial years.

(AQW 403/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Expenditure on Social Security benefits by the Department for Social Development for the last five years is detailed in the table below.

Year	Amount (£000s)
2006-07	3,938,282
2007-08	4,099,185
2008-09	4,366,618
2009-10	4,722,659

Year	Amount (£000s)
2010-11	4,888,579*

* The figure for 2010-11 is draft and is subject to an audit review by the NI Audit Office.

The latest estimate of Social Security benefit expenditure for the current 2011-12 financial year was that provided within the Chancellors Spring 2011 Budget. The amount was £5,227,701k. The amount will be subject to review as the year progresses and as information on actual benefit expenditure becomes available.

Social Security Benefits

Mr Craig asked the Minister for Social Development how much money has gone unclaimed in Social Security Benefits in each of the last three financial years, broken down by type of benefit.

(AQW 404/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information requested is not held by my Department as there is no available data source that can be used to accurately quantify the monetary value of unclaimed Social Security benefits.

Pension Credit

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how many people are currently in receipt of Pension Credit.

(AQW 448/11-15)

Mr McCausland: At May 2011 there were 97,095 people in receipt of State Pension Credit in Northern Ireland.

Neighbourhood Renewal

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Social Development how much funding his Department has allocated to Neighbourhood Renewal in the North Antrim area, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 464/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The table below details funding allocated by the Department for Social Development to Neighbourhood Renewal in the North Antrim area in each of the last three years. Ballymena is the only Neighbourhood Renewal Area situated within the North Antrim Parliamentary Constituency. Figures relate to contracts awarded which may span multiple years.

Parliamentary Constituency	Allocation 2008/09	Allocation 2009/10	Allocation 2010/11
North Antrim	£537,076	£424,136	£447,840

Notes: A range of factors will influence allocation including, notably capital projects. The history of investment in an area from other initiatives or mainstream sources, the size (population) of an area, the geographical location and proximity to existing services and the 'lead-in' period required to establish structures and produce Neighbourhood Renewal Action Plans will also impact on ability to utilise funds.

Social Housing Proposals

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the social housing proposals which are currently being considered for each council area.

(AQW 555/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I am currently considering the draft Social Housing Development Programme that has recently been presented to me. I hope to be in a position to publish details of those schemes included in the 2011/12 financial year in the coming weeks.

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